THE MASTER-WORD

A Story of the South To-day

BY

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To

MY BEST OF ALL THE SOUTH

My Father

AND

My Husband

NOTE

To place a story in the phosphate region of Tennessee locates it so definitely, and within such narrow limits, that a word of explanation seems called for.

Many of the incidents of this story, especially those more or less sensational in their nature, actually occurred within the writer's experience or knowledge; but while some of them are real happenings of the phosphate country, others took place elsewhere, and beyond the borders of Tennessee. They are here brought together in one place for the purpose of the story, — a purpose, it is hardly necessary to say, in full accord with Southern thoughts and hopes.

NASHVILLE, TENN.,
1905.

THE MASTER-WORD

I

In a quiet upper chamber of the spacious old house Philip Lawton lay between life and death, indifferent to both alike. The accident in which he had been injured had occurred near his home, and he had been brought there unconscious, though outwardly unhurt. For three days his body lay motionless, a mute, impassable barrier between the man himself and the woman who watched in tearless silence beside his bed. She had shut out of her mind all thought of what life bereft of her husband would mean to her: so long as the possibility of serving him remained she lived for that alone. To-morrow could meet to-morrow's grief: for the present her emotions were silenced by an unyielding will, and every faculty was strained to divine his needs, and to fight for him the battle he could not fight for himself.

His eyelids fluttered at last ever so little. Presently they opened, setting free a glance of intelligence and love. Her soul leaped to her eyes to answer it, but she leaned forward quietly and pressed a few drops of liquid between his lips. She touched his forehead lightly, and with the flicker of a smile upon his face he passed

into a dreamless sleep — that safe upper chamber of unconsciousness too near and too familiar for any of us to fear.

For the moment the fight seemed won; but as the days passed and he still lay there, conscious, but with no other sign of rallying life, daily losing his scanty store of strength, the doctor grew anxious once more. The most distinguished physicians of the state were called in consultation. From the sitting room across the hall Margaret watched them come and go. As the door closed on the last one she came swiftly forward to the old man who had known her all her life.

"Will Philip live?" she asked. "Don't try to spare me; I want the truth."

"I cannot tell, my dear," he answered sadly. "With his youth and his constitution he must have great rallying power; but the shock has gone deeper than we can tell. He may react against it yet; I think he would if only a stimulus sufficient to rouse him could be found."

"What kind of stimulus?"

"I do not know. It is as if he himself, the man, had dropped below the point where he could use his physical resources: another shock — if we only knew what kind of shock, and could supply it — might lift him to the necessary level. But it might quench his life altogether; and it is all speculation, Margaret: he may rally without it; he has held his own to-day, I think. We can only wait and hope."

She turned from him, hiding and choking back the sudden tears. Once more she put behind her the thought of the mutilated life which must remain to her if her husband were taken away. She went up the stairs steadily, but when she reached his half-opened door a trembling seized her and her eyes filled again with tears; the strain had been too great. She passed on to her own room to regain her self-control before returning to Philip.

She leaned against the window, looking out across the lawn and the wide fields to the broken sky-line of the hills, and then drew back as if stung. Just so she had leaned against that very window, looking out at those same hills, when she told her mother she had promised to be Philip's wife. She had stood there in her wedding dress the night she married him, when the moonlight flooded all the fields. The eight years had flown by, swift as a weaver's shuttle, and brought her to this last week where time had ceased, and in all the universe only love and pain remained.

How long she stood there she never knew. The sharp opening of a door in the still house roused her. Who could have disturbed the silence with that sound? She went swiftly and noiselessly out into the long hall, and at the far end of it, where a door led to the back stairway, she saw a colored woman coming slowly toward her. It was no unusual thing for a

negro to come to her for help or advice, and her only feeling of surprise was that the woman should have chosen such a time, or been allowed by the servants to come upstairs. She went quickly to meet her.

"Do you wish to see me?" she asked softly.

The woman looked at her with cool defiance.

"I don't keer whether I sees you or not," she answered; "I come to see Philip Lawton. Where is he?"

Margaret's eyes widened.

"Mr. Lawton is seriously ill. You must go downstairs at once. Do not make any noise."

"I knowed he was sick," said the woman, sullenly, half overawed in spite of herself. "That's why I come. He ain't goin' to die an' git away 'thout payin' me money."

Margaret's eyes blazed.

"How dare you!" she demanded. "As if Mr. Lawton's debts were ever unpaid! Who are you?"

If the woman had been a full negro she would scarcely have ventured to enter the house; certainly she would have abandoned her purpose at sight of Margaret; but this woman was three parts white. For generations the worst elements of white blood and black had mingled to accumulate her evil inheritance. Just now her black nature was in abeyance, and her white nature, selfish, reckless, lawless, defied the woman who faced her.

"Who are you?" repeated Margaret.

"I'm the same as you are," said the woman, insolently; "I'm the mother o' his child."

Margaret drew back unconsciously, white to the very lips. Then she sprang forward, touching the bell with one hand, and laying the other on the woman's mouth. She was terrible to see. The butler came hurriedly up the steps.

"Put this woman off the place," said Margaret, in a low, tense voice. "If she makes the slightest resistance, use force. Do not allow her to speak. Go."

Eli seized her arm in a compelling grip. The woman, all negro again, turned obediently and went down the steps in terror of the silent figure above her.

Margaret stood where she had left her, her thoughts shrivelling in the fire of her wrath. Her one conscious wish was a consuming desire to wash the hand which had touched the woman's lips. She held it up and looked at it as if it were an alien thing. She turned back to her room: she could not go to Philip with that pollution upon her. But as she passed his door she saw with horror that it was still ajar, and from within he called her, in strong, excited tones.

"Margaret! Margaret!"

She was in no condition to face him. Even her love could not calm at once a nature so outraged, so furiously angry. She passed the

door without hesitation. For his own sake she must have a little time; he had never seen her like this; she herself had never known that she could be like this, and the shock — she remembered suddenly what Dr. Ward had said, and paused in agitated confusion.

"Margaret!" called Philip, imperiously, "come here!"

She obeyed mechanically, her face still white with the anger which was giving way in her own consciousness to the wild hope that after all the unspeakable lie might be the means of saving Philip's life. But there had been no time for this feeling to overtake the other and supplant it in her outward expression; and what Philip saw was a face of stone, and eyes before whose fury he shrank and paled.

"What did that she-devil tell you, Margaret?" he demanded, shaken by illness and agitation out of all his self-control and resourcefulness. "Did she dare to bring that brat to this house?"

Margaret came to a dead stop.

"What do you mean?" she asked in stupefaction.

Fear, anger, and mental weakness blinded him to his opportunity. Or perhaps it was because his guilt stood suddenly apart from him, freed from the prison of his secret thoughts, and laid its withering touch on his perception as well as on his power of self-defence.

"I heard her say something about the child,"

he persisted. "Why do you come in here in a white fury and pretend not to understand? You have a right to be angry, I know; but you need not refuse me a chance to defend myself. Oh, curse her!" He ground his teeth with rage.

Margaret stood staring. Presently she came close beside him.

"How old is the child?" she asked. She thought afterward with an aching pity of the depth to which she had fallen; if the child were older than her marriage she would thank heaven upon her knees.

A dull red crept under the pallor of his face.

"How old, Philip?" she implored.

He made no answer.

"Was it since our marriage?" she demanded.

His eyes fell.

"Was it since Richard's birth? Answer me."

His face answered for him.

"Philip," she said gently, "if you ever loved me at all — or if you never loved me, yet out of sheer pity for me do not torture me any more. Tell me how old it is."

"I don't know, Margaret. Three or four years."

"Elizabeth was four in June," she said absently. She was looking at the maple branches just outside the window. One leaf, gray and stiff, hung at the end of a long shoot, its points curled up like the fingers of a dead hand clutching after vanished treasure. She turned toward the door.

"Margaret!" cried her husband, brokenly, "I am ashamed to speak of my love for you, but, by heaven, it's the greatest thing in my life! Give me a chance to prove it to you! Don't go, Margaret!" His voice broke to a shrill cry. He caught her hand. She snatched it from him — the hand which had lain on the woman's lips; it was doubly polluted now.

She moved across the room without speaking, and rang the bell. The nurse answered it — a negro man, trained in the Nashville hospitals.

"It is time for Mr. Lawton to take his wine," she said quietly. "Ah, you have brought it with you. He seems so much stronger," she went on, conscious of the man's covert scrutiny, "that I shall obey Dr. Ward and lie down. Call me at once, if I am needed, but not otherwise. Wait; I will give him the wine myself."

She took it in a steady hand, and carried it to the bed.

"Drink this, Philip," she said, bending over him; then, in a low tone, "The man is watching; do not let the servants know."

He drank the wine with some difficulty, and fell back, half fainting.

"Telephone for the doctor, Jackson," said Margaret. "Hurry."

Until he came, she and the nurse applied such remedies as they could; and Dr. Ward found him resting quietly, and decidedly better.

"The crisis is past, Margaret," he said. "This

reaction is only temporary, and the congestion is wonderfully relieved. There must have been a shock, after all."

"There was a shock," she answered, "but I — I am too tired to talk." Her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor child, you are worn out with the strain. Go to bed, and stay there; he won't need you."

She went to her own room, and threw herself upon the bed. Now that she was free to shed tears, they would not come. Feeling and thought alike forsook her. Her only consciousness was of utter isolation in some vast waste, cold, dead, illimitable. Gradually, as she lay there, detached memories of her life floated past her, picture after picture.

There was the first day she had been driven in to school at Fulton, a little maid with yellow curls and starched white frock. One of the boys had tweaked her hair at recess, and Philip had driven him away. Philip was a big boy with a red necktie.

Once he had given her a humming bird that he caught in a butterfly net. He would not speak to her afterward, because she set the bird free.

She went to a party at his mother's once; she wore her first silk stockings. She had tried so hard not to look at her feet. Her curls were tied back with a blue ribbon; she was quite a big girl now.

He had gone away to college. After that he

had studied law. Then he had gone to Europe. She was away at school herself then, and dreadfully homesick. He had come to see her on his way home. It was raining that day, and she had been crying. She would have known the wave in his hair at the temples anywhere. He had a daisy in his button-hole — a marguerite, he said. He had brought her some beautiful roses.

She and her mother were in New England that summer, and he came there for his vacation. He had tried to say something that last night, and she had laughed and made him angry. She did not intend to fall in love.

They had been to a dance when she went home at Christmas. He had sent her pink carnations, but he wore a daisy again.

It was the Christmas after she left school that it had happened. They were putting up Christmas greens in the church. There was a crowd of young people there, but they were quite private behind their big column, bristling wide with pine and cedar. She had not told her mother until the next morning. There was the chair her mother sat in. She saw again the tears in her mother's eyes. Were they tears of thankfulness or of dread? She could not remember her father.

Suddenly a wall seemed to fall from about her, and she saw herself surrounded by women — Hagar, Leah, Œnone, Octavia, Pompilia, and millions more, of every race and age, and type

of wrong, their separate individualities melting into an awful unity of pain. What, in this sea of misery, was the wreck of one woman's life? What right had one to happiness more than another? What hope of happiness could there be when men and women must live in the same world? She buried her face deeper in the pillow. The women faded away and left her alone in her wilderness.

Meanwhile the October day had faded, and old Aunt Dilsey, worn out with long watching in the room next to that in which her beloved mistress lay, and having finally arranged her own plan of action, descended upon the gossiping servants in the kitchen like a besom of destruction. It was her own great-niece, living in Nashville and a stranger to the Fulton negroes, who had tried to force her way to Mr. Lawton; and Aunt Dilsey had long known, to her anger and shame, what Margaret had learned only that morning. Now, as always, her one idea was to serve the interests of her "chile."

"W'ich I got de bes' mine in de worl' ter make Miss Marg'ret tu'n de las' one er you niggers offen dis place," she declared wrathfully, breaking without warning into the kitchen council. "Dey ain't been a lick er wuk done in dis house ter-day, en yer hit's mos' night! Ef I tu'ns my back, you-all quits wuk en goes ter doin' sumpin' you ain't got no biznez doin'. I yeared you-all w'ile I wuz comin' down de back stairs,

settin' yer swappin' lies 'bout yo' marster. I gwine tell Miss Marg'ret. Don' none er you know nothin', en I ain't gwine tell you nothin', 'cep dis: Me en Miss Marg'ret goes ter see dat nigger 'ooman eve'y time we-all goes ter Nashville. Her gran'mammy wuz one er Marse Phil's pa's niggers, en Miss Marg'ret en Marse Phil done hope bring up de whole fambly er dem chillun sence dey pa got kilt wukin' on de railroad. Dis un's name Sally — Sally Means. She married a black man name Pete; en Pete's a plum' bad nigger. Marse Phil done paid 'im outer jail forty-leben times, en 'e done sont word las' week he warn't gwine ter pay 'im out no mo'; en dat yaller huzzy come down yere kyarryin' on 'bout money fer ter git Pete out, en sayin' she en de baby starvin'. I wish ter de Lawd dey would! She done mos' kill Marse Phil; en Miss Marg'ret faint w'en she git back ter 'er room, she been so scairt up erbout 'im. En yere you triflin' niggers set, lettin' strange folks go up ter de w'ite folks' bedchamber, en Marse Phil erbout ter die! You cook yo' dinner, Par'lee Potter. Go rub dem steps down, Eli, seein' ez you fergot hit dis mawnin'. Malviny, quit fingerin' dem pigtails er yourn en go ter wuk; ef I fine de same spots dis night on Miss Marg'ret's silver coffee-pot w'at I seed dar dis mawnin' you kin go back ter yo' mammy en let 'er put you in de co'n-fiel' whar you b'longs. Don' talk ter me 'bout free niggers! I wisht I had er rope fer eve'y one er you!"

This gallant sally of Aunt Dilsey's, with its really brilliant improvisation of lies, had the desired effect. No one but Eli had heard anything of the conversation in the hall, and Dilsey's tale explained his confused impressions sufficiently well. It was certainly true that Aunt Dilsey, meeting Eli and his prisoner at the foot of the back stairs that morning, had called her Sally, and had taken her in charge as an old, though scarcely a valued, acquaintance. She had herself taken her to town and put her on the train, and returning had gone at once upstairs where Miss Margaret was, remaining there all the afternoon. Moreover, Aunt Dilsey's word was law, and she had never been known to lie. Her story is current in colored circles about Fulton to this day.

"Ain't dem chillun come home yit?" the old woman demanded indignantly of Parralee, the only remaining occupant of the kitchen. "Dat Lola ain't fitten ter be trusted wid um outen my sight. I dunno huccome I put up wid 'er like I does. She know Dick's allus gittin' sick, en der's gwine ter be a fros' ter-night, en I lay she done tuk 'im out widout er coat on. Dat chile 'll have de croup ter-night, en me en Miss Marg'ret settin' up wid 'im twell daylight, en dat triflin' gal snorin' in her bed! Oh, you's come, is you?" she went on in a high voice as she heard the side door open and the sound of childish voices. She opened the door into the back hall hurriedly.

"Come yere ter yo' mammy, you blessed lambs," she called in honeyed tones to the children. "You Lola, is yo' Marse Dick got his coat on?"

"Yes, Aunt Dilsey."

"En a mighty good thing fer you he have," said Aunt Dilsey in a somewhat mollified voice. "Come yere in de kitchen wid mammy, honey, en let her see ef her man's good en wa'm."

She had Elizabeth already in her arms, and drew Dick after her gently.

"Dish yere's de lady don' have no croup, nor do nothin' else w'at 'll pester her pore ole mammy," she said proudly, standing Bess on the table while she unfastened her wraps and passed them to Lola. "Dat's right, Dicky-man; you des wa'm yo' han's at de fier en tell Par'lee ter git you er cole biscuit. I gwine take Bess up ter 'er ma. Miss Marg'ret done say she want 'er."

"I hopes de Lawd 'll fergive me fer de lies I done tole dis day," she thought within herself as she mounted the stairs; "but Miss Marg'ret do need de chile, whe'er she done sensed hit er no."

She went softly down to her mistress's door and slid Bess to the floor. Her loving instinct told her plainly what the child must do.

"Yo' ma's on de bed, honey," she whispered, "er mebbe she's on de sofy. She's sick en wo' out. Don' you say a word w'en I opens de do'; you des tiptoe 'cross ter whar she at en clime up en cuddle up ter 'er whe'er she say ennything er no. Tell 'er you needs er pettin'."

She opened the door noiselessly, and drawing it to after the child, turned away, resisting with a delicacy which would honor any lady her longing for one sound from that silent chamber.

A moment later Bess crawled under her mother's arm as it lay across the bed and laid her warm cheek against her mother's cold one. Margaret caught her in a close embrace. She had forgotten her children, ingrate that she was! No life could be utterly desolate which held the compelling need for living that one might spend one's self for one's own body and soul. The children were hers forever, by a tie which crime itself could not weaken. She pressed her face against Bess's curls and found the relief of tears.

II

Two weeks later Philip had recovered sufficiently to go about the house, and in a few days was to resume work in his office at Fulton. He was in the sitting room this morning, on one side of the bright wood fire, his face turned toward the cheery blaze, but looking covertly at his wife, who sat near a window whipping lace on one of Bess's little garments.

"You have refused to discuss our affairs, Margaret, on the ground that I was not yet strong enough to bear it; I hope my being downstairs disposes of that objection. It is strange to me that you do not understand that the worst possible strain for me is the one you have forced upon me. Nothing that either of us could have said could have been as hard to bear as your continued silence and coldness. I can't start life again without your forgiveness and love. I need you, dear; these days have been intolerable."

There was genuine emotion in his voice, but unconsciously there was a sense of injury as well. His first feeling had been purely one of shame and self-reproach. It was true, as he had said, that his love for Margaret was the greatest

thing in his life; and with each day he realized more clearly how necessary a part of his daily existence was Margaret's love for him. He felt his wife's suffering most keenly — so keenly, indeed, that it became quite reasonable to pity himself as the unhappy cause of that which so sincerely afflicted him. He had tried several times to tell her of his misery, his need of her, his repentance — the three things took this order in his mind — but each time she had refused, gently, it is true, but decidedly, to open the subject until he should be stronger. Lying in his room, cut off from the ordinary interests of his busy life, his own personality was the nearest and most vital subject of thought; and the subtle alchemy of selfishness, by a world-old process, began to transform a wrong inflicted into a wrong endured. Margaret was unreasonably severe; plenty of men did worse things than he ever thought of — men who loved their wives, too. It was hard on her, of course; he had done her an injury — and he had been deuced unlucky, too. The fact that it was hard on him bore in upon him with ever-increasing force. It was his intention, however, not to make too much of this fact in talking with Margaret unless it should become necessary; he had hurt her, he was sorry, and he loved her; it was an absolute necessity to any real comfort in life that her adoring, unquestioning love should be restored to him at once. After all, the thing which cut a

woman deepest in a case like this was her feeling that her husband's love for her had failed : he must make her understand how mistaken such a feeling was.

Watching her now, as she sat by the window, he noted the change in her face ; it was thin and pale, her eyes tired and old. It suddenly occurred to him that she must have been crying a great deal. The sweet curves of her lips had hardened, as if she held them by force of will in their accustomed lines. A sudden rush of pity for her blotted out for the moment his pity for himself. He crossed the room impulsively and seated himself close beside her.

"Margaret, dearest," he said tenderly, "even if you forgive me I can never forgive myself. I wish to God I had died before I hurt you so."

"I wish you had, Philip," she answered sadly ; "I wish it for your sake even more than for my own."

Philip felt a distinct shock. It is one thing for a man to offer his life, even in words, as a sacrifice for a woman's happiness ; it is quite another for the woman calmly to accept it.

"You are certainly frank," he said bitterly.

"We must be frank, Philip," she answered, dropping her work in her lap and turning that she might face him fully. "I want to tell you what I have decided. Of course the first step does not now rest with either of us : it is simply a fact to be acknowledged that the law of

marriage having been broken, our marriage is at an end."

"Margaret," he exclaimed excitedly, and then stopped, checked by the look in her gray eyes. He caught his breath with a sense of suffocation.

"That fact is the basis of all we have to say," she went on steadily, holding his eyes with hers: "it is not a matter for discussion. We are done with the past: our only concern is with the future."

"I will not submit to it," he cried hotly; "my authority counts for something, I think."

"It counted for a great deal, while you possessed it; but it no longer exists."

"Indeed? And where did you learn that?" he demanded. Pity for her had dropped out of his mind: he felt only the man's primeval necessity to subjugate the woman he has chosen. In the first days of their estrangement he had thought with positive terror of the possibility of her resort to the courts; but the more he thought of the possibility the less it terrified him. She was never a woman to go to extremes; she had not the first element of vindictiveness in her; and her love for her children, he was absolutely sure, would prevent her from entertaining even for a moment the thought of a divorce. He still felt easy on that score; but evidently there was an unsuspected hardness in her, as well as an unsuspected guile, which enabled her to threaten

him with that possibility in order to gain her real end, whatever it might be. She must wish to force from him a pretty big concession when she resorted to such means.

"You will find that my authority counts for something, I think," he went on boldly, "even if you propose to take your grievances to a divorce court, and run the risk of being separated from your children."

She neither paled nor winced.

"I shall never be separated from my children," she said quietly. "In regard to a divorce, I shall secure it only if you force me to do so. It is because I wish to avoid a divorce that I discuss the matter with you at all. But you must understand that a public divorce is the only alternative to what I have to propose."

"You are ready with your evidence, I suppose?" he inquired, with affected carelessness.

"I can put my hand on it if I need it, Philip," she replied; "I beg you to believe that. But believe at the same time that I have not said a word to any one which could suggest the smallest breach between us; I wish that kept entirely between ourselves."

"Then where is your proof? I heard you send the woman away; you do not even know her address." He was convinced that she was trying to frighten him, and he wished to show her how childish it was.

"Philip Lawton would be a sufficient wit-

ness," she answered calmly; "I scarcely think he would perjure himself — though after all, I do not know. But I am not dependent upon him; I can put my hand on the other proof, and I will, if you force me to it."

She was sure, indeed, as women are without words, that Aunt Dilsey could tell her all she might need to know. A question to Eli had brought out the fact that Aunt Dilsey had taken charge of the woman at the foot of the stairs, and had gone with her to town; and the sympathy in the old woman's face, respectful, guarded, yet intensely felt, had told her the rest. Aunt Dilsey, if she ever wanted to know, could tell her everything; if not, she would never speak: the shameful secret was as safe with her as it would have been with Margaret's own mother, dead these seven years.

They both sat silent for a space, seeing one another in new lights; and to both the revelation was bewildering. In the past two weeks there had been times when Margaret's agonized sense of Philip's repentant suffering had almost turned her from her purpose; and now every word he spoke contradicted all her conception of him. She knew that her idol had fallen; she had never imagined the coarseness of its clay.

To Philip, on the other hand, Margaret's self-assertion was no less amazing. He had always known that she was a strong woman; he had rested on her strength as on a rock: but he had

always thought of it as something under him, subject to him in all ways. It had never occurred to him that she had any strength with which to oppose his will. She had been the most gentle and submissive of wives: from the time that he had entered her home, on his marriage, he had ruled both it and her without effort or question. He was first angered, and then frightened, by the growing perception that he had ruled because it had been her will that he should rule, and that against her final decision he must dash himself in vain. She seemed already far beyond his reach; and, after the manner of his kind, he found her more to be desired than when she lay passive under his hand. He leaned toward her, impassioned appeal in his dark eyes.

"Margaret," he said eagerly, "forget what I have said. I was only trying you, dear. And whatever you want I must accede to it; I am utterly in your power. Remember that, and that I love you, and be merciful to me."

"I would not be unmerciful," she answered slowly; "but we must think of the children first — they have the right. Whatever is best for them must be borne without regard to our own suffering. It is the only tie between us — what we owe to them; but it is strong enough to control our lives."

"That is what I knew you would feel; the children —"

"Must never know. For that reason I am

willing to go on, outwardly quite as usual. To the children, the servants, and the world, there need be no change whatever. Only we ourselves will know that our marriage is dissolved and our love dead. I did not say that it would not be hard," she went on hurriedly, as if in fear of interruption; "for me, at least, it would be infinitely easier never to see you again. But for their sakes I bear the burden myself, and I require the bearing of it from you."

Her head was held high on her slender throat; her look commanded obedience.

"Where is your doctrine of forgiveness?" he asked. "Yesterday I heard you telling Bess and Richard something about 'seventy times seven'; is that a commandment adapted only to children?"

"I ought to forgive you, Philip; I do try. But that does not alter the fact that the law is broken. We must bear the penalty; there is no escape."

"Why do you say that love is dead?" he demanded, driven to take his stand at last on the point from which he had hitherto shrunk, knowing it to be that on which all must be lost or won. "I never loved you better in my life than I do now, I never reverenced you so. Margaret, you can do anything with me, make of me anything you will; do not cast me off. It is not possible that you do not care for me any more — my God, it isn't possible! Think of

the long years, dearest, of all our happiness together, of how we have grown into one another's lives. Do you think all that is so easily thrown aside? Dear, you are deceiving yourself; it cannot be; we are part of each other now, for better or for worse. Try me, Margaret; try me just once."

Two tears rolled down her cheeks. She parted her lips to speak, but closed them again to stop their pitiful quivering. He leaned toward her, not daring yet to touch her hand.

"Dear, I have sinned," he said; "I have been hateful to you only this morning; I was half mad at the thought of losing you. Margaret, you are my all, my pearl, the one woman in all the world."

"The one woman!" she said scornfully through her quivering lips.

"Yes, the one woman, by heaven!" he cried. "You make me wish that for one moment you might be less perfect, that you might comprehend the truth! Do you suppose that for one second my love for you was weakened?"

"There spoke the beast!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "And it is the truth, the truth! And I — I thought I married a man!"

"Men came from beasts!" he answered passionately; "there is law for you, if you will have it! We struggle upward, all of us, fighting God knows what brute nature within; and you — you good women that stand above it all will see

us perish in everlasting burnings before you will pity us or try to save! The moment you realize our need of you, you turn your backs. It was the beast that spoke! And because it was, the man demands your love and help!"

"And I have no love to give!" she flashed back, standing before him like a tall, white flame. "The beast must rise to a certain point before one can call it a man! Oh, do not be deceived! I did not cry because I love you — no, no, no, I am spared that degradation! It was because of the man I did love, the beautiful dream man whom I clothed with your flesh and worshipped all these years. I have lost him, lost him forever, and the thing that is left turns me sick to see! Oh, I must not talk, I must not!" she cried pitifully, pressing her hands to her throat, and looking wildly at him as he stood, white and stone-still, before her. "Let me go now, Philip. We need never speak of it again. I will be quiet; I will be considerate; I will do everything for you that I can; I will gratify every possible desire. I will try to help you, Philip; I will try to help you to be good. I will do all that for the children's sakes; I will try to do it for yours. I will be your servant, your slave, — anything but your wife. But never speak to me of my husband again — you have neither part nor lot in him. He is mine, mine — and I have lost him!" She burst into a passion of tears and ran swiftly from the room.

III

THE days went on, as they have gone from the beginning. Outwardly life settled into its accustomed routine, and to no one but old Dilsey was there any change in the home. Her loving instinct could not be deceived; but she would have felt herself a recreant had she ever hinted to her "chile" her knowledge of the truth. She watched the subtle changes in Margaret's face with deepening bitterness, and found her only comfort in such an asperity of mien to the other servants as made their lives a bondage of fear. Through the long evenings she mused sadly in her comfortable cabin on the vanity of earthly things. She went back to the time, just after freedom, when Thomas Jefferson, for seventeen years her lawfully wedded husband, had left her and "taken up" with Maria Jervis, an eighteen-year-old yellow girl from a neighboring plantation.

"De Lawd done cu'sed de wimmin long er Eve's eatin' dat apple," she thought. "Dey des borned ter trouble, black en w'ite erlike. Sally — she ain't no better off dan my pore lamb dar in de house; she wuss off, kase she de debbil's own, en she don' keer ef she is; en dat baby's de

wuss off er de th'ee un um. I lay Eve's a-settin' on de hottes' coal in hell dis minnit fer w'at she done, en w'en I gets ter hev'm I gwine look over de jasper wall en see 'er doin' hit. I mouter bin sorry fer 'er ef hit hadn't er bin fer my mistis; but de Lawd know bes', en he done put 'er right whar she b'long."

Margaret, meanwhile, bent all her faculties to the task which she had set herself. But for the children she would have found it beyond her strength; for their sake it was accomplished. In one way and another, the body of the dead home was galvanized into an appearance of life sufficiently natural to deceive all those who looked on; but to her who knew the truth, this companionship of the unburied corpse was a fearful thing. It did not occur to her through the long winter months that Philip, sharing the ghastly secret, might share the horror too. Beyond a grateful consciousness that he accepted the situation as she desired, and a careful routine attention to his outward comfort, she put Philip out of her thoughts. Her tears, her agonies, were not for Philip, but for the dream husband whom she had lost. Absorption in her own suffering she recognized as selfish, and strove to put far from her, making desperate efforts to retain her old interest in the persons and things about her: of any selfishness of her absorption in the struggle to fulfil her own hard task she was utterly unaware.

So, inch by inch, the winter days dragged on. Even when at last they looked for spring — the beautiful early spring of middle Tennessee — cold and darkness clogged the wheels of life. Late in March there came an unprecedented snow-storm, shrouding the stark earth as if for burial. Resurrection seemed but a dream of the heart.

On the afternoon of the snow-storm, when Philip came back from town, a furious wind came in at the door after him as if it were driving before it some wrecked waif of the storm. He came in coughing and shivering. In reply to Margaret's question, he said that he had not taken cold, but that if he had known how severe the storm was, he would have telephoned her, and remained in town. He went to his room earlier than usual, and next morning was unable to leave his bed. Dr. Ward pronounced his malady pneumonia in a severe form. Consulting physicians were called in, everything possible was done for him, but he grew steadily worse.

"It is the shock last fall that is killing him, Margaret," said the old doctor. "I have watched him all winter, and he has never really rallied. He was even more ill than I understood; he must have been. I never saw a man age and break so in five months in my life. He not only doesn't react; he hasn't vitality enough left to try."

Margaret faced him, very pale.

"Do you mean —"

"I mean you must give him up, my dear," said the old man gently; "you must face it very soon. But Margaret, my child, do not forget your mercies; you have had eight happy years: if my wife —" he choked and turned away. His wife had died within a year of their marriage, and he had carried her in his heart ever since.

Margaret went back to Philip's room, scarcely conscious of what she did. The confusion of her thoughts and emotions oppressed her physically. She sank into the chair by the bed, trying to breathe naturally. At a sign from Philip the nurse left the room.

"Margaret," he said weakly, "may I speak this once of the forbidden thing? The dying have such privileges. It is for your sake, dear, not mine."

Unconsciously her hand sought his; his fingers, weak and eager, closed about it. His touch, so long unfelt, recalled her to herself, but for pity's sake she could not withdraw her hand.

"I am glad I am to die," he went on slowly, pausing now and then. "It is the only thing that I can do for you. It seems almost too good to be true. My God, if I had lived to be old, and chained you to this life always!"

"Don't, Philip, don't," she implored.

"But this is what I must say. I have been afraid, dear — death changes so many things, and you are so pitiful by nature — I have been afraid

that sometime, perhaps when you are old, you might come to think of me as if — as if I had suffered too much. You might even blame yourself, dear heart. And so I want to tell you, before it is too late, that you have blessed me always, and never more than in these last five months. I loved you always, Margaret; even the brute would do that; but I was beast as well as man, even in my love. When the break came it was my own suffering that was the intolerable thing; I could not live without you. I cursed your standard; it seemed cruel, mad. But nothing —" he paused, white and exhausted.

"Oh, Philip, wait!" she cried. "You must save your strength. We can talk again to-morrow."

"This is all I need strength for," he answered presently; "all the rest is finished. And to-morrow —" he smiled a little, and lay with closed eyes.

"Nothing moved you," he went on, "nothing. You were the incarnate law of God. You burned into me what law meant, and justice. I was a lawyer, but I had never thought what law like that meant to me — to every one. I saw it all — the rightness of law, and of penalty. Margaret, you lifted me up. Through you I vanquished the beast. I face death a man through you. Never regret that you did that for me; never think you were hard."

Her tears choked and blinded her. Through

their mist the dream man seemed beside her, melting into Philip's flesh.

"But Dick, Margaret. I would like to stay with the boy, if it were not so horribly hard on you. Help him, dear. He must fight that fight some day — fight it and lose it, perhaps, before he is a man. So many boys do. Their own mothers do not lift a hand. They perish in their ignorance, like the poor blind brutes they are. Teach Dick; if it works good for the boy it will be easier for you to bear. If he knows what justice — "

Margaret dropped her head on the pillow beside him.

"I have tried to be just, Philip," she sobbed; "and I have ruined both our lives! It was love we needed — more love."

He turned his face to hers.

"We needed both. Law, justice, love. Love is the Law above the law, the master-word of all. But it never breaks the law, even when it supercedes it. And first one must learn the law; how could you forgive me else? Dear, it is worth the cost."

There came a long silence.

"Philip," she whispered, "we will begin again. You will live for me, Philip; I need you so."

"Dear, it is too late; I have used my life up learning. But the separation is ended. Death is a small thing — an incident; we can afford to wait."

He closed his eyes again and lay dozing, while she watched, his hand in hers. Presently he looked at her again. She bent her head.

"The — the child, Margaret. I did what I could. Never let that trouble you — you are noble enough to think of it. It will be educated for its own place in life. But think of the heritage. Can the master-word be spoken in a life like that?"

He closed his eyes again with a groan. Margaret slipped down upon her knees, her head upon the pillow, her cheek to his. Silence fell between them, and again he seemed to sleep. Darkness gathered about them. One by one the stars stood without, watching, radiant, in the still evening air. At last she lifted her head and tenderly, solemnly, touched his lips with hers. But Philip, her dream man, had slipped away.

IV

MARGARET sat on the lawn, under an old beech, her head leaning against its silvered trunk. The sunlight, falling through the young foliage, touched the waves of her hair to bronze. Her clear, gray eyes turned from following the children, to rest for a moment on the high-rolling hills and drink in the beauty and the promise of the spring. For the snow had been death's own winding-sheet and life had seized the vacant throne. The dead earth had risen in a night. Flamelike mists of red and gold had gathered on the bare hillsides, and deepening into soft green clouds hung about the once barren trees. The breath of violets filled the air. Along the fence, at the farther side of the wide lawn, hundreds of daffodils blazoned abroad the glory of the spring.

Bess, her lap heaped with blossoms, sat on the floor of Dick's express wagon, her family of dolls about her, while Dick himself, high on the seat, drove Brown Joe to town. The wooden horse was a notable roadster, and they were going at a furious pace. Their laughter bubbled like a brook in spring.

To Margaret, leaning against the beech, the life

of the children, like that of the young year, blent with the resurrection in her own heart. The sense of reunion with Philip was too strong for death to shake; their separation was ended, as he had said. If he had been killed in the accident the fall before she could scarcely have borne his loss; but through the winter, in her abyss of desolation, she had sounded the depths of that separation which comes from the death of love, and against an arisen love she found the death of the body powerless. As she sat watching the children her thoughts were not with them, but with Philip, and that unknown waif who had received from him the evil heritage of life. She was thinking, as she had often done in these weeks since her husband had passed beyond her sight, of his last words and of the low moan which had followed them. The vague thing which had stirred within her when she slipped to her knees at his bedside had been taking definite form to itself almost without her knowledge. She had been unjust to Philip, unmerciful, self-righteous, and he in his repentance had not only attained a clearer vision than herself, but had passed beyond her reach. There was nothing she could do for him — nothing to prove the truth or the humility of her love. Nothing. Unless — Why should she not? If she took up, as it fell from his dying hands, the task of righting the wrong for which she had forgiven him, would not the last point of separation be-

tween them vanish? He would know then that in nothing had she held herself aloof from him; they would be too close for even the memory of a sin to come between. If she could right the wrong of which he had despaired, would it not be an offering worth bringing to the altar of her love?

She did not deceive herself with the hope of an easy task. She recalled the woman's handsome face, insolent, hard, animal, moulded of all the evils two races could supply; the child would be like that. Like its mother, it was by inheritance an outcast, forever an alien from the race which had fathered it, and yet in its own feeling hopelessly set apart from the race to which it must belong. Life was difficult enough for the most favored; but for one like that —

She started as Bess's little hand fell on her own. The child's rosy mouth, puckered to a knot and covered with dirt, was held up without a word. She brushed the dirt off, smiling, and the little lips, freed from their unpleasant encumbrance, opened for an explanation.

"We been kissin' our shadows good night," she said. "Aunt Dilsey says the sun pushes 'em up in the trees eve'y single night. See how long an' fine they's gettin'; they's beginnin' to climb now."

"Is it cold in the trees when it's dark?" asked Dick, looking doubtfully up into the branching heights of the old beech.

"Not for outdoor shadows," said Margaret, gravely. "House shadows mightn't like it. House shadows get lonesome, too, evenings like this, when the sun goes down and it begins to grow chilly. We'd better go in and keep them company."

"Let's send all three of our shadows up in the same tree," said Dick; "then the Bess-shadow and the Dick-shadow can have the mother-shadow all night; they can't get lonesome that way."

He trotted about until his shadow fell on the tree trunk, but when he moved aside it fell back on the grass. He looked at his mother, puzzled, and she waited to see what he would do.

"Aunt Dilsey says they won't climb if you look, Dick," interposed Bess. "Le's turn 'round."

They all turned their backs to the tree, one by one standing before it and throwing a stealthy glance behind them to make sure that the shadow had begun to climb; then with eyes set steadily before them they went to the house, the children clinging to their mother's hands.

"Good night, shadows!" they called from the porch, kissing their hands to the beech.

That night, when the children were safely tucked in bed with their house shadows curled snugly under their respective beds, Margaret sent for Dilsey. She came in presently, the flicker of a little wood fire lighting up her spotless turban, her apron, and the whites of her eyes. All else was but a blur upon the dark.

"Huccome you settin' yere in de dark, honey?" she inquired. "You oughter be mo' cheerfuller, chile. Lemme light de light."

"No, Aunt Dilsey; I like the fire, and you know I can't have it many more evenings. Sit down; I want to ask you something."

Aunt Dilsey pushed a big old-fashioned velvet-topped stool before the fire and sat down, her face turned expectantly toward her mistress.

"Aunt Dilsey, you remember that colored woman who came here last fall while Mr. Lawton was ill?"

The old woman's face, seen by the leaping firelight, was a study. She appeared to grope in her memory for some forgotten trifle.

"Las' fall, Miss Marg'ret? 'Pears like I does rickerlec' sump'n like dat. Wuz it w'en Marse Phil wuz sick?"

"You know it was, Aunt Dilsey; and you know why she came; I have seen it in your face all winter. I want to find the child."

"De Lawd, Miss Marg'ret, w'at you wanter do dat fer? Is you got a misery in yo' head?" she asked anxiously.

Margaret smiled involuntarily.

"Aunt Dilsey," she said, "you knew all winter the trouble I was in; but you do not know, I think, that Philip and I — there is only love between us."

"Bress de Lawd!" exclaimed the old woman, tears running down her face. "I knowed my

lamb done gŏt comfort somers. Hit's des a pleasure ter grieve atter folks w'at's lef' you fergivin' en lovin' um."

"But I want the child. Where does it live?"

"W'at you want wid it, Miss Marg'ret? Hit ain't de chile's fault."

"I know. I want to help it. Do you think its mother would give it up?"

"She run off en lef' hit right atter — las' March. She don' keer. She wouldn' er kep' hit dat long on'y she wuz paid."

"But some money was left —"

"She never knowed hit, bress yo' soul. Ef she did, she'd er stayed. She run off ter Saint Louie, er Illernoy, er somers up dataway, en never tole nobody whar she gwine. She say she gwine 'way ter spen' de day, en give a 'ooman a dime ter tek keer de baby; en Unc' Lige Moses' boy seen 'er tek de train fer somers dat mawnin', en she tole him she warn' never comin' back no mo'; en she ain't."

"Aunt Dilsey!" cried Margaret in anguish, "do all these people know?"

"No, honey. Don' nobody know 'ceppin' you en me en her. She wuz paid ter keep still, en long ez she couldn' mek nothin' by lyin' she kep' 'er promise. Nobody 'spected nothin'. De lawyer-man w'at Marse Phil sent de money ter, he didn' know who give hit ter Marse Phil; he axed de 'ooman w'at's got de chile, en she didn' know. I knowed, kaze one time w'en we-all wuz

in Nashville I went en taxed Sally wid hit, en den she tole me; she wuz skeered not ter."

Margaret was silent.

"De servants down yere don' know nothin'," Dilsey went on presently; "I tole um a whole passel er lies — smart lies dey wuz, too," she added, in approving reminiscence; "en dey all b'lieved me, kaze I ain't a lyin' nigger in us'al, Miss Marg'ret. I wuz glad I wuzn't dat day!"

"Why did you go to see her in Nashville?"

Dilsey hesitated.

"Don' ax me, honey," she said.

"It doesn't matter," said Margaret. "It is only the child I want. Aunt Dilsey, will you go to Nashville and get it for me? Bring it here as a relative of your own — don't tell me anything you mind; call it your ward, if you like. We will do our best for it together."

"Honey," asked the old woman, tenderly, "is you got de strenk? Is you gwine stan' seein' dat chile yere on de place wid Bess en Dick?"

Her old black hand touched Margaret's tremblingly; the firm white one clasped it close.

"I have thought of everything, Aunt Dilsey," she said quietly. "You or I will be with the children always; they can't come to any harm. And I must do it, for Philip's sake."

Aunt Dilsey came back in a few days, bringing the child with her. This time she told no lies.

"Dish yere's Elviry Sampson, Sis 'Nervy's gre't gran'chile," she announced to the servants.

"Her gran'mammy dead, en 'er gre't gran'-mammy dead, en 'er ma done run off en lef' 'er. I'm er gwine ter tek keer un 'er en mek a decent nigger outen 'er ef de Lawd gimme de strenk, en de peach trees don' gin out."

V

The long, brilliant summer was over, and autumn was already come. Here and there in the thickets along the roadside the black-gum flaunted its vivid crimson; the thick green of the maples hid leaves that were growing brown and dry; goldenrod blossomed in the fence corners; and down by the brook which ran from under the spring-house one might find a few dry spears of grass concealed amid the riotous green.

It was not by signs like these, however, that the melancholy season announced itself to Bess. Something much more tangible and important than a few dead leaves had intruded itself upon her consciousness and brought the delightful summer to an end: Dick had started to school. All day she wandered disconsolate through their familiar haunts with Viry following meekly at her heels and proffering timid consolation from time to time in the guise of cold biscuit, a dejected-looking peach, suggestions of play, and friendly conversation. But Bess was proof against all seductions. The thing which rankled most deeply in her mind, deeper even than the woful knowledge that a boy once caught in the toils of learning must pursue his painful way

forever and ever and never stay at home with his sister any more, was the recollection of the joy with which Dick had started off. He had a new pony and a beautiful lunch-box, and Bruce Carleton had come for him and carried him away.

Bruce was a big boy, more than two years older than Dick, their nearest child neighbor and best friend. He was an orphan, the son of Margaret's dearest friend, who had married, against her family's wishes, a penniless school-teacher, and had gone with him down to Louisiana, where she had lived in poverty and happiness for five delightful years. Then, in one short week, she and her husband had both died of yellow fever, almost the first victims of a sudden epidemic.

After her husband's death, and with the same fatal malady already pointing out to her the path by which she must follow him, she had written a letter to the half-brother who had reared her and then cast her off, imploring him, for the sake of the love he had once borne her, to give her child a home. Her husband, she said, had insured his life when the boy was born, and they had always managed to pay the premiums. The income from this small sum would perhaps cover the bare expense of maintaining him until he should be old enough to go to college. The principal was to be spent for his college training; and after that "I can trust him to make his own way," she wrote, "and he must know that I ex-

pect it of him. He is only four years old; but he has his father's forehead and eyes, and he shows already your steady, practical power of perseverance. Courage and honor he inherits from all of us."

William Bruce had read the letter with tears in his eyes till he came to the sentence about the boy's forehead and eyes; then he had started to throw it into the fire. He snatched it back just in time, and thrust it angrily into a drawer of his desk. He went for the boy himself. In his heart he resented his sister's dying independence almost more than he did her living rebellion. If she had once asked for help, either for herself or for the child, he would have given it gladly; but he would give nothing unasked. He stood in the little house where she had lived and died, and set his teeth in a speechless rage against womenkind in general and his mother and sister in particular. Why had his mother ever married again — a handsome, dissolute beast of a man who had squandered his own fortune and so much of hers as was not tied up for the benefit of William, her son? Why had his sister ever been born, and left to him at his mother's death, to find her way into his innermost heart, as his own children had never done? She had been a beautiful girl. She and Margaret Davison between them had had the pick of the men in middle Tennessee; and to marry John Carleton, a beggar, a dreamer, a fellow chock

full of poetry, and as empty of common sense as a last year's gourd! "His father's forehead and eyes!" What the deuce had she named the brat after him for? He wanted nothing named Bruce around him that had Carleton forehead and eyes!

He brought the boy home and turned him over to his wife with orders that he be provided for. He gave him his food and a seat by the fire, and thought of him as little as possible. If money had to be spent for him, he took it out of the income from the insurance money, resenting afresh every time he did it what he called the damned Peyton pride. His step-father had been a Peyton: Mr. Bruce was aware of no other pride in the entire family connection.

As for Mrs. Bruce, she obeyed her husband's orders to the letter, as she always did. If they might be stretched to contain anything beyond the letter, she was never conscious of the fact; the all-important part, the letter, as she had found to her cost in the first years of her married life, was clearly expressed and beyond appeal. She was a faded, vapid, selfish little woman, jealous of her husband's old love for his sister, and fearful that a reviving tenderness for her might some day divert some of his property from her own children. She saw with satisfaction his evident dislike of the little boy, and kept him out of the way as much as possible.

But for Margaret the child would have had a

lonely life. She had taken him to her heart at once. She was the one person who had never stood in the slightest awe of William Bruce, and he never objected to anything she chose to do. The child stayed with her for weeks at a time. He was Dick's constant companion, and from her birth Bess's devoted slave. His cousins were all much older than himself, and inclined, moreover, to regard him with scant favor, so that Margaret's house was his real and only home. He called her aunt, and gradually merged into her gracious personality his memories of his dead mother. Bess regarded him as one of the most useful persons in her small world. She took his comings and goings as part of the established order of things. She could not remember the time when school had not laid its mysterious claim upon him; but she did not object to it, since Dick was really the best one to play with, and Bruce always managed to do for her the things she wanted done which were beyond Dick's power. But that Dick too should be carried off to school was an unforeseen calamity.

She wandered at last into the kitchen, buried her head in Aunt Dilsey's lap, and burst into tears. Viry, in the doorway, looked helplessly on, snuffling in vigorous sympathy.

"I clar ter grashus!" exclaimed Aunt Dilsey in well-feigned consternation. "Yere hit's mos' twelve erclock! I wuz gwine ter give Dick a party w'en 'e come fum school, en now de

mawnin' done slipped erway twell I ain't got no time fer ter fix hit. Him en Bruce 'll be comin' erlong befo' I kin tu'n roun'. Ef I had somebody ter he'p me —"

"Oh, Aunt Dilsey, may we have it at the spring-house? May we?" cried Bess, dancing up and down, while Viry wriggled and beamed behind her.

"De spring-'ouse!" exclaimed Aunt Dilsey; "way down dere at de bottom er de hill, en me wid de rheumatiz in bofe knees? Who gwine tote cheers en dishes 'way down dere?"

"Viry and I'll do it, Aunt Dilsey," said Bess, gleefully. "Oh, please!"

"You-all is too little ter tote much at er time," said Aunt Dilsey, severely. "Ef I lets you have hit, will you carry de plates one at er time, en not spute en quoil, kaze hit's too much trouble?"

They promised faithfully. Aunt Dilsey, rising with much deliberation and painful care of her knees, took the little folding table from the pantry where it waited for such occasions, and started toward the door. Bess and Viry each took up one of the little chairs.

"Let Viry tote de cheers, honey; you kin have dish yere table-clof. Cheers is too big fer you."

"I'm bigger than Viry," said Bess, proudly.

"Viry's a nigger," said Aunt Dilsey; "hit don' hurt niggers ter tote cheers w'at's too big fer um."

Bess looked doubtful, but obeyed dutifully. Aunt Dilsey led the way through the back yard, down the long hill, and set the table in place under the beech tree, which spread its great arms above the spring-house. The spring-house itself was now disused, and stood with its thick stone walls and oaken shingles, a relic of the days when ice was an almost unknown luxury, and milk and butter were kept sweet by standing in pans set in the cold spring water which bubbled up in the cool darkness of the little, windowless house.

It was a beautiful place for a party. All around the hills rose, swelling softly and spreading into wide, fertile wheat-fields, filled now with yellow stubble and ready for the fall ploughing. A dozen beech trees, laden with nuts just waiting for the first frosts to ripen them, clustered in the little valley, and filled it with the shade of their murmuring boughs. The stream, flowing out under the southern wall of the spring-house, spread into shallow little pools where baby feet could splash and wade. Water-cresses fringed its banks and lent their crisp, cool greenness to the adornment of suitable and unsuitable dishes alike. Everywhere the blue-grass spread its thick carpet — a carpet embroidered here and there with yellowing, spotted leaves, the advance guard of the hosts now waving their green banners against the sky.

Aunt Dilsey sat heavily down on the roots of

the tree while the children spread the cloth, and began, under her direction, the endless journeyings to the house for supplies.

"Fer de lan' sake, take dish yere puppy wid you," said Parralee, handing down the eatables already arranged by Aunt Dilsey on the kitchen shelf; "he's tormint 'nuff w'en Dick's home ter play wid 'im, but he bin stickin' right under my foots all day, yappin' en barkin' twell I done got plum wo' out wid 'im. Ef he keeps on stayin' in de kitchen disaway, he gwine nachelly fo'ce me ter w'ar stockin's: I ain't gwine stan' 'im gnyawin' on my legs no mo'."

Bess laughed and caught the puppy in her arms. She carried him down to the spring-house and deposited him on the edge of Aunt Dilsey's skirt, where he lay squirming restlessly, but too aware of Aunt Dilsey's threatening eye to run about or indulge his propensity for "gnyawin'."

When Bess and Viry made their last trip there was only one plate left for them to carry. Bess promptly appropriated it, and then, seeing Viry's look of disappointment, said graciously: —

"You can bring anuvver chair."

"Ain't nobody ter sit in it," objected Viry. "We's got one fer you, en one fer Mr. Dick, en one fer Mr. Bruce; en you gwine fix cushions fer Miss Marg'ret, en I gwine stan' up."

"I'll put 'Hemuff in it," said Bess, promptly; she never hesitated over anything. Behemoth was the puppy.

Viry laughed delightedly and seized the little chair; but halfway down the hill she stopped.

"I ain't gwine carry no cheer fer a dawg," she announced. "If dawgs kin come ter de table, niggers kin come."

"Niggers can't," said Bess, decidedly. "But Viry —" she put her head on one side and surveyed her companion critically — "you isn't a nigger; you's white."

"Aunt Dilsey say I's a nigger," said Viry, finally.

"Well, you isn'" — Bess, bold as she was, caught her breath as she found herself on the edge of this heretical contradiction of authority. "You look like you's white," she said doubtfully.

Viry's face flushed with pleasure under her clear olive skin. She was well past her fifth birthday, being only a month or two younger than Bess, but she was smaller and slighter than her companion. Her hair, a dull, purplish black, was cropped short, and lay in loose rings over her little head. Her features were regular, her mouth thin-lipped and sensitive. Her whole appearance was of a type not especially rare among mulattoes; and until she lifted her heavily fringed lids there was nothing markedly to distinguish her from any other bit of olive humanity. But when she raised her eyes, as she did now, looking at Bess, one felt a distinct shock; for not only were they wide and bright,

as unlike as possible the heavy-lidded dulness of negro eyes, but they were blue in color; that peculiar pale blue which one sometimes, though rarely, sees set in the incongruous darkness of a mulatto face, and which witnesses silently to the sins of the fathers, and to the visiting of sin upon an innocent generation. Her face was bright with intelligence, and as she stood looking down at the chair in her hands she was distinctly pretty. But the thought of beauty fell slain before her eyes; for that which looked out of them was white. It looked at Bess now, timid, yet appealing. Bess held her plate of tea-cakes carefully in one hand and slipped the other around Viry's neck.

"You's lots nicer'n 'Hemuff," she said; "I'll fool Aunt Dilsey so you can come."

Her eyes danced with excitement. It was no empty boast, as they both knew. Aunt Dilsey's word was supposed to be law; but with the exception of her mother, Bess trod everybody under foot, and received none the less their admiration as she did so.

She trotted up to the table now and put down her tea-cakes with a face as innocent as the dawn. Then she shook back her yellow curls, took the chair from Viry, and raising her limpid brown eyes said coaxingly: —

"Aunt Dilsey, please let me put a place for 'Hemuff."

"Why, honey," said Aunt Dilsey, "de puppy's

too little ter come ter de table. He ain't got no mo' sense dan ter upset de whole party. He ain't got no manners yit; he des a puppy."

"May he come when he gets big?" asked Bess, meekly.

"W'y, in co'se," said Aunt Dilsey, charmed with her easy victory, and ready to promise anything for the indefinite future; "in co'se he kin come w'en 'e gits sense."

"Then why can't Viry come?" demanded Bess, boldly; "does God like dogs better'n darkies?"

Aunt Dilsey gazed at her speechless for a moment, and then burst into laughter.

"Ef you ain't de cutes', smartes' chile in dis county!" she exclaimed, catching Bess up in her lap and kissing her in delight. Then, as the enormity of the request dawned upon her, she felt the need of administering a rebuke.

"Dat's some er yo' doin's, Elviry Sampson," she said wrathfully. "You go 'long back ter de house. I lay I'll whup de nonsense outen you yit — wantin' ter eat wid de w'ite folks!"

"She didn't!" said Bess, stoutly; "I did it myself; and you said mother used to eat in your house with Uncle Eb and your little girl that died!"

"Dat wuz diffunt," said Aunt Dilsey. "Eb'neezer en M'ria wuz slaves, en Miss Marg'ret wuz dey little baby mistis. Ef I baked my chillun a pone er co'n-bread en dey mistis wanted some, she could have hit. She eat offen one side, en M'ria en Eb'neezer eat offen de udder."

"But why — "

"You's too little ter unnerstan,' honey," said the old woman; "niggers is done got spoilt en biggetty dese days; dey 'lows dey's good ez w'ite folks, en dey ain't. Dey has ter know dey place — ef you kin mek um know hit. Ef one nigger wuz ter eat wid de w'ite folks, we-all dat wuz quality 'ud have ter move outen de county. En mo' dan dat," she went on, moved dimly by the tragedy of Viry's eyes, "dis yere chile is er nigger, en she ain't got ter fergit hit one minnit. Come yere."

Viry came obediently, a puzzled look on her little face as she saw the troubled earnestness on Aunt Dilsey's.

"I knows you ain't black on de outside like me en Par'lee, Elviry," she said solemnly; "but dat's des skin-deep. Ef I wuz ter peel off dis yere skin er yo'n, you'd be ez black ez me underneaf. Don' you en Bess fergit hit; you's black. En black folks b'longs wid black folks, en ef dey does diffunt, old Satun gits um, sho'. You en yo' Miss Bess kin be good frien's, same ez Miss Marg'ret en my Eb'neezer is good frien's; but Eb'neezer, he er nigger, en he know hit, en Miss Marg'ret know hit, too; she de lady, en he de servant; en hit's des daterway wid you en Bess. De onlies' place w'at's w'ite in Viry," she went on impressively, "is her soul. De Lawd puts w'ite souls in eve'ybody. Ef de w'ite folks tells lies, en don' mind dey mammies, dey souls tu'ns

plum' black, des like my face, en Satun gits um eve'y time: en ef de niggers is good, en keeps whar dey b'long, en does dey wuk de bes' dey knows how, dey souls is so w'ite Satun won' have um, en dey goes ter hev'm wid de w'ite folks; dey's w'ite deyse'f."

"Can they come to the white folks' parties in heaven?" asked Bess, much impressed by the old woman's unwonted solemnity.

"I dunno, honey," she answered doubtfully; "de Lawd ain't say nothin' 'bout dat. But dey's w'ite. En hit's bekaze I wants Elviry ter be w'ite den dat she ain't gwine ter be settin' down wid no w'ite folks now."

A sudden shout made the children look up. Dick and Bruce were running down the hill. Bess wriggled out of Aunt Dilsey's lap and ran to meet them, half smothering Dick with her embraces.

"We's got a party," she announced gleefully. "Le's go get mother."

The three ran back to the house and reappeared with Margaret. Dilsey rose respectfully as they approached and went to the house. The children, after seating Margaret among the cushions where the roots of the tree formed a natural seat, took their places at the table, while Viry trotted contentedly about, waiting on them, until the meal was nearly finished, when she retired with her own portion to a near-by root, listening to, and occasionally joining in, the eager talk of the others.

VI

MARGARET'S altered life settled into an accustomed round, and the years slipped by unheeded. After Philip's death, when, as sole legatee and administratrix of his estate, she had made an examination of his affairs, she found that almost the whole of his own large fortune, as well as that part of her own which was not invested in her home and plantation, had been sunk in a western railroad speculation which, even up to the time of his death, had apparently promised great returns. Her plantation, however, even as inherited from her mother, was one of the largest and richest of that rich section; and Philip had added to it from time to time, as adjoining lands had come upon the market. Her position was one of comfortable independence; but she wished, for Philip's sake, to pass on to their children an inheritance unimpaired by his misfortunes; it was still another way of proving her new oneness with him. Her own wants and those of the children were of the simplest. She reduced the staff of servants to the basis of necessity, sold most of the driving horses, and sent for Ebeneezer, Aunt Dilsey's son, to take the management of the farm under her direction.

Ebeneezer lived a mile or more up the road on the farm which Margaret's mother had bequeathed to Aunt Dilsey, and which she had promptly turned over to her son. For herself, she had no intention, "long ez her head wuz hot," as she expressed it, of leaving the cabin in the yard where she had been born, or the service of the family to whom, in her own thought, she still belonged; and while she greatly respected her daughter-in-law, she was not at all sorry to have her settled at this convenient distance, instead of in the near-by cabin where they had lived so long as Ebeneezer had rented land from his former owners.

Ebeneezer had married when he was quite a boy, and his wife, some years his senior, had taught the public school to which his mother sent him, with a full determination to stop him as soon as he could read the Bible and "do sums." Beyond this she had small use for education, except for white folks; and she never felt quite easy in the presence of her learned daughter-in-law, whom she long suspected of uncanny and dangerous knowledge. As a matter of fact, Jane's education was by no means so extensive as Aunt Dilsey supposed; but it was supplemented by sturdy character and an uncommon amount of hard common sense. She continued Ebeneezer's instruction unsparingly after their marriage, but she worked as hard as if, in Aunt Dilsey's phrase, "she didn' know nothin' but

cookin' en scrubbin'." They cleared money year by year. Since moving to their own place, they had enlarged their house and added to its comforts, bought more land, and opened a bank account. Ebeneezer's word was as good as his bond, and any white man in the county would have trusted him without question. His wife inspired him with ideals and ambitions for their children; the oldest was preparing to study medicine in Nashville, while his next brother was destined for a teacher, and the youngest boy was to stick to the farm.

His new position as overseer of Mrs. Lawton's plantation paid Ebeneezer well, but it took his whole time, and left his own farm to Jane, with such help as the boys could give her out of school hours. She not only rose to the occasion herself, but she saw to it that the boys rose too.

"Minute your book-learnin' makes you too fine to work your education stops short off, June Davison," she announced. June was named for his father, and to avoid confusion was known by this abbreviation of Junior. "Long as your ma can scrub, an' your pa can fling a hoe in the corn-field, you can chop wood an' plough, if you get to be wise as Moses" — a decision from which there was no appeal.

Margaret, herself, took an active part in the management of her property, and surprised and delighted Ebeneezer by her shrewdness and business ability. He had looked up to her all her

life as a cross between a humming-bird and an angel; to find her possessed of "as good a head for business as ever Marse Philip had," was an unexpected good fortune. Between them they made the plantation pay; and Margaret, still living in great simplicity, looked forward to the time when Dick should finish college and enter upon his profession with a comfortable bank account to his credit.

Just what his profession was to be she could not tell, though she early gave up the hope that he would follow that of his father; he was too shy and solitary in his tastes, too averse to argument, or to the company of any but his immediate home companions. She could find no trace of the instinct of leadership. This she grieved over in secret, as a woman will who, herself capable of leadership, suppresses that power for love of her husband and her home, and fuses all her personal ambitions into a hope for her son's future. He was a warm-hearted boy, devoted in his quiet way to Bess and to Bruce, but worshipping his mother with a passionate intensity which grew steadily with his growth. Next to these three he loved books, and the beautiful country around his home. He was a silent fellow, old beyond his years. While still almost a child, he began to interest himself in the management of the farm, not, as his mother divined, from any liking for business, even in its simplest aspects, but because his love for her impelled him

to find some way to help her. Whatever he set his hand to, he mastered; and more and more she learned to depend on his judgment and to follow his advice. He had never outgrown his early delicacy; and as Bess grew up, strong, supple, overflowing with life and energy, riding like a young whirlwind, climbing trees, fishing, shooting, walking unheard-of distances, Bruce became more and more her companion out of doors, ready always to fall in with any madcap plan, and to outdo her in her own game, whatever it might be. But Margaret, watching her two children in the evenings, when Bess bent her red-brown head close to Dick's fair one, while they examined his latest "specimen," or read together from some book, felt sure that there was no danger of the two growing apart; only Bess should have been the boy, she thought, with her independence, her abounding energy, her easy mastership of those about her.

Bess herself would have rejoiced in being a boy, and above all things in heaven and earth resented her lengthening skirts. She reached her full growth rapidly, being during all her childhood unusually large for her age; but at fourteen she suddenly stopped just short of middle height, while Viry, keeping steadily on, outgrew her a full three inches. She cared nothing whatever for personal adornment, demanding only "clothes easy to get into," and tying her curls back with a hard hand and a

tight knot in the ribbon. But nothing could hide her beauty. Bareheaded, as she ran in all weather over the farm, her skin was like a blush rose. Her eyes, of a deep, clear brown, sparkled with health and intelligence, and flung a laughing challenge to all the world, while about her lips there lurked perpetual smiles. Her hair, deep brown in the shadows, shone with red and gold where it caught the light as it rippled from the roots to the loose, soft curls falling below her waist. Next to her skirts, these curls were her greatest trial; but her mother and Dick took such pleasure in them that she early ceased begging to have them cropped. After all, she was a girl, and there was no way of getting out of it; and she accepted the inevitable with a laughing mockery of her own impatience of it, trying merely to wrest from life such fun as a girl could —an occupation in which she found Bruce's help invaluable.

Bruce was proving himself a clear-headed, practical boy, more or less obstinate, except where Bess was concerned, putting through to a finish everything he undertook with a dogged determination which nothing could turn aside. Notwithstanding this quality he was a friendly fellow, popular at school both with teachers and pupils, the more so that he never thrust himself forward in any way, though he proved quietly capable of any task committed to him. The "Carleton forehead and eyes" seemed to have been inherited

from some more distant ancestor than his own father; for if he had the tendency to dream and to idealize, Bess alone appealed to it, a fact which perhaps accounted for the strength of her hold upon him, but of which he himself was quite unconscious. He only knew that Bess filled his world, and had always filled it, and always would. He even forced himself to tolerate Viry because of her love for Bess.

Neither Bess nor Dick had found it necessary to tolerate Viry; she had made her own place, and filled it as a matter of course. Dick, indeed, rarely thought of her; but when he did it was with that genuine, but impersonal kindliness which he kept for all the world outside the charmed circle of his affections, where his mother reigned supreme, with Bess and Bruce for her only companions, and Aunt Dilsey, at a respectful distance, as attendant satellite. Bess, for her part, was very fond of Viry, and would have made a genuine sacrifice to give her pleasure or to avoid hurting her; yet she was chiefly, as was natural, the passive recipient of Viry's passionate affection. They had always played together. Viry had been a much less vigorous child than Bess, and was physically indolent; she hated to wade in cold water, she was afraid to climb trees, she trembled when she galloped bareback across the fields; but where Bess went she followed, drawn by something she could not resist. She lived outdoors until her slender little body grew

strong and vigorous, and though she could never outrun Bess, or outdo her in any "stunt," she learned to keep up with her, neck and neck. As the children grew older Bruce once or twice objected to her companionship, and thereby promptly drew upon himself the full contents of the outpoured vials of Bess's wrath.

"I don't care if she is a darky," Bess declared; "I've always played with her, and as long as she wants to come, she shall. Play and darkies go together, anyhow, and I mean to play till I go to college — and afterward, too, if I like. If it doesn't suit you, you can go home — pig!"

"I'm not a pig!" said Bruce, wrathfully. "I just don't think it's nice to have that darky tagging around every time we go anywhere."

"She never tags," said Bess, warming to the fray out of pure love of battle as she often did. "Viry and I go somewhere, and you tag, and we let you."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bruce. He stopped, crimson and speechless. Bess laughed in spite of herself, and in spite of himself Bruce caught the contagion and laughed too.

"If she were just a plain, everyday darky I wouldn't mind so much," he explained; "but she's such a horrid, uncanny-looking creature; she gives me the creeps."

"Uncanny!" exclaimed Bess, indignantly; "why, she's like a picture! Just think what

perfect features she has, and the way you can see her color come and go."

"Yes, and think about her eyes," said Bruce, with disgust; "they look like an old second-hand pair that somebody'd had out bleaching for ages before she got 'em. I never saw such a looking darky in my life; she's worse than a hoodoo."

"Nonsense!" said Bess, impatiently. "She's coming now. Do be nice to her, Bruce. It would break her heart if I should send her back; you know it would."

"Oh, let her come along," he said good-naturedly, unconsciously assuming a power of permission he did not possess. "I don't wonder she wants to come; you'd make a dummy have a good time."

Bess accepted the compliment graciously, and the three trudged off with their fishing poles, Viry carrying a little box of lunch, which explained her delay.

Though Bruce had no suspicion of it, no less a person than Margaret herself was troubled over Viry's fondness for Bess. What disturbed her was not the quantity of the affection — it could hardly be greater than Aunt Dilsey's love for Margaret herself — but its quality. From the very first, and quite unconsciously, Viry had held herself aloof from the colored children who came to the place in the wake of their fathers and mothers. Her cousins, Ebeneezer's children,

she was more frequently thrown in with, but she treated them with a cavalier condescension which aroused their own and their mother's liveliest resentment.

"I don't like them," was the only explanation she could give Aunt Dilsey; "I like Mr. Dick and Miss Bess."

"In co'se you likes yo' w'ite folks, chile," said Aunt Dilsey, impatiently; "I ain't never 'cused you er bein' er plumb fool. But dese yere chilluns er Eb'neezer's — June en Jackson en Pete — dey's yo' kin. You mus' love um."

"But I don't," said Viry, helplessly.

Margaret heard this story with misgivings the summer that Viry was seven years old; but it little prepared her for the frantic outburst which came that fall when Bess and Viry began their school days, Bess at a private school in Fulton and Viry at the county school for negroes. Bess started off gayly enough, and came home the first day radiant with a consciousness of new worlds to conquer; she had already made a dozen friends. But Viry, whose school was much nearer home, had come back earlier, and with a pale, set face, had gone straight to Margaret in the sitting room.

"Miss Marg'ret," she said, quietly enough, and then, her self-control swept quite away by the necessity for speech, she suddenly dropped to the floor at Margaret's side and burst into a passion of tears.

"What is it, Viry?" she asked in concern.

"I don't want to go to school!" she sobbed; "I can't — I won't!"

"Why?" asked Margaret, putting her hand on the child's shoulder. "Was any one unkind to you? If they were, I will speak to Susan about it; she won't let any one trouble you."

Susan was the teacher, and Margaret had known her all her life. Viry still shook with sobs; but at last Margaret made out that some of the girls had put their arms around her, and one of them had tried to kiss her.

"I hate 'em!" she said furiously, her tears dried and her eyes burning; "I hate niggers!"

"Why, Viry," said Margaret, with a sudden shock. She looked full into the pale, angry eyes for a moment, drawing her breath sharply as she did so; then she said gravely: —

"You must not hate any one, Viry; I have tried to teach you a better way than that."

Viry looked at her defiantly.

"They shan't touch me," she said.

"No," said Margaret; "I will speak to Susan about it. And they won't want to touch you if you don't like them; but after you have been there long enough to make friends with them perhaps you will like best one of those very girls with whom you are so angry now. Still, if you don't, you must remember that they mean to be kind, and you must be kind to them."

"I don't want to go back! I don't want to

be kind! I hate 'em!" sobbed Viry, relapsing into tears again. "Please, Miss Margaret, let me stay home. I want to stay with Miss Bess."

"You can't stay with Miss Bess always, Viry," answered Margaret. "You both have your work to do in the world, and it isn't the same kind of work. You can always be friends, but you can't possibly be together always."

Viry's sobs broke out afresh. Margaret quieted her as best she could, while still insisting that she must go back to school the next day. She stopped crying after a while, and sat in silence while Margaret talked on, groping blindly after the right words, and desperately conscious of not finding them. At last the child rose, a look of dumb misery on her face, and walked slowly to the door. As she opened it she turned and looked full at Margaret, a look freighted with the passive endurance of the race she had so passionately repudiated, and went out.

For some time Margaret put her hope in the daily associations of the school; but Viry made no friends. She led the class without effort, and despised all whom she outstripped. She made no more complaints, at first because she knew it to be useless, and later because she began to understand that it was necessary to go in order to keep up with Bess. With the help of what she learned at school she was able to study by herself at home; she seized upon Bess's books as they were finished and thrown aside, and

mastered them, with occasional help from Bess. So far as Mrs. Lawton could see, even after several years had gone by, her one motive was merely a consuming desire to know whatever Bess knew, to keep up with her mental progress as she kept up with her physically in their races over the hills. The child seemed to find nothing else worth living for.

Margaret was greatly troubled. She finally decided to send Viry away to school in order to break off her association with Bess, and, if possible, by throwing her with a brighter class of colored children, to enable her to form friendships with those of her own race. Aunt Dilsey quite agreed with her mistress, and when Viry was thirteen she was sent to a school of which Margaret had personal knowledge, and for whose white teachers she had thorough respect.

It was a hard time for Viry and for every one interested in her. Her protests, when she was first told of the arrangement, were those of some wild creature, trapped and crazed. Bess cried in sympathy for her, and begged with all her might that Viry be kept at home; but finding it all to no purpose, turned her attention to comforting Viry, which also proved a hopeless task. The storm raged for several days, and then the wave of Viry's passion crested, and broke against Margaret.

"It's you that's doing it!" she burst out. "I could scare Aunt Dilsey and make her stop.

You have always made me do things. Why can't you let me alone? I'm none of your business, am I?—Oh, I hate you, I hate you!" She dodged Aunt Dilsey's sudden lunge and ran out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

"Miss Marg'ret," said Aunt Dilsey, horrified and ashamed, "you mus' let dat chile go. You done borne wid 'er pas' all reason. Sen' her ter dat school en don' never let 'er come back; she ain' fitten. I lay I give 'er one good whuppin' 'fo' she go, en den I's done."

"Don't touch her, Aunt Dilsey. She doesn't know what she says, and we can't expect her to understand. Be patient with her, and wait."

Aunt Dilsey sniffed indignantly; but Margaret's word was law. Viry, coming up after dark from the spring-house where she had taken refuge, and creeping into the cabin for the last time, expecting a whipping as a matter of course, was allowed to go to bed unmolested. She lay there hour after hour, weak with the force of her spent passion, her swollen eyes staring up through the darkness, her slender body shaken now and then by a slow, long-drawn sob. Aunt Dilsey, herself lying awake, heard the child, and her heart melted more and more. After all, she loved Viry dearly. She rose at last with many wheezings, and made her way to the little bed.

"Honey," she said tenderly, "come yere ter me."

Viry drew in her breath quickly, and then, as

she felt Aunt Dilsey's arm slip under her shoulders, turned and clasped her convulsively. The old woman soothed and comforted her for a long time, until at last the tense little body relaxed, and she fell asleep.

She went away very quietly next morning, in Ebeneezer's care. Aunt Dilsey was sent to spend Christmas with her, and when she came back the next summer, bringing with her the record of an excellent year's work, Margaret congratulated herself that the new plan was working well. Viry's eyes followed Bess with the old adoring look, and occasionally she joined her in some expedition about the plantation; but for the most part she kept closely with Aunt Dilsey, helping her in the lighter tasks about the house, and sitting with her in the evening on her cabin porch where the water-maple swayed against the sky overhead and the moon dappled the yard with shadows.

But though she was quiet and outwardly content Margaret found it impossible to gain her confidence in any degree. She was perfectly respectful; but she met any attempt to penetrate to her inner life with a speechless resistance which baffled all Margaret's art. She was forced at last to give up the effort; for the time the only help which she could give the girl was such as she could not recognize as coming from her.

In September she went back to school, this time without resistance, and continued there, year after year, until she was prepared to enter

one of the best of the negro colleges. Margaret had decided that she should be prepared to teach. To this, as to everything, Viry gave only a passive assent; but as she could not be brought to express a preference in any other direction, and as it seemed to promise a more congenial life than any other profession which was open to her, Mrs. Lawton settled the question finally herself.

VII

At seventeen Bruce entered college. It had for years been Margaret's intention to defray the expenses of his college course in order that he might start in life with his small capital unimpaired; but he refused to consider her proposal.

"I have money enough for a course in Nashville and a year at the North," he said, "and that is all I need. If I work hard enough in the summer I can get my academic and engineering degrees together in five years; then I can go North for a year. If I need anything more I can work awhile and make the money; I'll know enough by that time to do that."

"But, Bruce, I have planned it all these years. You might show a little kindness to your mother's dearest friend."

"It is because you were her dearest friend that you should respect her wishes," said Bruce, an obstinate look on his handsome, boyish face. "You know what she wrote to my uncle: she meant for me to make every inch of my own way beyond what she and my father could provide for. I've meant to do it all my life. I can't take favors from anybody, even from you."

Margaret protested in vain.

"You must at least remember that I am her representative," she said at last, "and if you need anything, come to me; you can't think she would mind your taking it as a loan."

"I would mind it myself, Aunt Margaret," he answered frankly; "you see it's because I think just as she did; and I won't need any help."

The next year Dick, though only sixteen, was ready to follow Bruce.

"You may go North if you prefer it, Dick," said his mother: "I want you to choose for yourself."

"I choose Vanderbilt, mother," he answered; "I'm not going anywhere away from you for four years. I can come home every week and help you about a lot of things. You know you're getting to depend on me, if I am only a boy; and I'll be a regular crank if I let go of everything but books for four whole years. I need the farm to keep me straight." He smiled whimsically, but his gray eyes were as steady as Margaret's own.

"But, my son, you can't be always tied to the farm; you must think of your profession."

Dick flushed.

"Mother," he said, awkwardly, taking her hand and drawing it gently across his eyes that he might not see her face, "don't be too disappointed in me; I don't want a profession. I have thought about it a long time. There will

be plenty of money for Bess, and half the farm besides; and I want to live right here. I know I can make you comfortable, and I don't want much myself but books and no bothering people around. I hate business and politics and all that; and what's the use of doing what bores you so?"

"But, dear, you won't always be alone. When you marry you will want to provide for your wife as our men have always provided for their women."

"I won't have her to provide for," said Dick, with conviction. "I'll never find anybody like you; and I won't have a wife who can't stand comparison with my mother."

Margaret smiled and shook her head.

"Wouldn't you like to teach, dear?" she urged. "That would keep you with your books. You could study in Europe after you finish here. There is no reason why you should not have a chair in one of the great universities some day — the distinguished Dr. Richard Lawton." Her lips smiled, but her eyes appealed. He should be distinguished only in some fine, high way; but her son must be known among men.

Dick shook his head.

"It isn't in me to teach," he said. "I don't like to mix with people, either. Of course, if something happened to make it necessary, I wouldn't shirk, I hope; but there isn't anything like that, mother."

Margaret looked at him a moment, her eyes clearing.

"You're just a boy," she said, "the dearest boy in all the world; but you can't tell yet what the man will want. We will wait."

He bent toward her and kissed her.

"Spoonies!" laughed Bess, dancing in through the window from the piazza. "If I weren't the sweetest thing in the world, as Aunt Dilsey says I am, I'd be so jealous of you two that my feelings would be lacerated past repair by this time. Diccon, if you're ever that maudlin about anybody but mother, I'll cut your acquaintance."

"I'll agree to that," said Dick, promptly, making room for her on the old sofa and slipping an arm about her waist; "but it's time for you to be getting a little maudlin yourself. Do you realize that I'm going to college next week?"

"Well, you'll come home for Sundays, thank Heaven," said Bess, who found a bright side to every situation. "And oh, mother, I've had such a lark! I met that sour old Mr. Bruce, 'right in de middle er de big road,' as Aunt Dilsey says, and the way I went for him about Bruce! He took off his hat to mop his forehead — it was my flow of language that heated him, for it's cooler than usual to-day — and his fuzz of hair stood up all over his head as stiff as so many spikes."

"Why, Bess," said her mother in amazement, "what on earth did you say to him?"

"I just asked him if he'd applied for Bruce's pass yet," said Bess, sweetly, "and of course he asked me what I meant; so I told him I knew he'd forgotten about it last year, but that I was sure he wouldn't again. I told him Dick was coming home every week because you had the money to buy him tickets, and that since Bruce hadn't any money to spare for tickets it was such a good thing that his uncle was a director in the railroad and could get him a pass for the asking. I thanked him for it beforehand, and told him how obliged we all were to him, and what fun it would be to have you and Bruce coming home every week, and how lovely it was for a boy to have an uncle like him — the old — critter!"

She laughed joyously, and Dick joined in.

"What did the old ramrod say?" he demanded. "Is he going to get it?"

"Faith, and he will," said Bess, serenely, "and I wrung a hard-earned compliment out of him, too, mother — a nice one. He told me to go home and tell my mother I was as saucy as Margaret Davison, and as pretty. It shocks me dreadfully, mother, to think of your being saucy!"

"I was never that bad," she answered, smiling; "but I wish you and Dick could understand Mr. Bruce a little better. He isn't really a hard man; he loved Janet dearly, and losing her soured him; and it's so hard for him to give up his own way."

"Just listen!" cried Bess. "Pretending to be saintly and charitable because that bald-headed old thing said she was pretty! But he didn't say you, mother; he said Margaret Davison — Margaret Lawton doesn't count. Now don't you think he's worse than soured?"

"I think he showed sense when he called you saucy," said Dick, rising and pulling her after him. "I promised Uncle Eb to go to Fulton about the new harness for the mules this afternoon. Come along."

They ran off together, and indeed stayed together pretty closely until Dick went off with Bruce. Both the boys came home every week, for not long after Bess's hold-up, as Dick called it, she received a large envelope addressed to Miss Elizabeth Davison Lawton, containing a pass for Bruce, good until the first of January. On the paper was written merely "With the compliments of William Bruce;" and in the corner, as an after-thought, "When this expires, ask for another."

"He would really like to help Bruce, I'm sure," said Margaret, "if the boy would only give him a chance."

"He ought not to wait for a chance," said Bess, indignantly; "and if I were Bruce, I never would make one for him, I know. I think Bruce is exactly right to go ahead and do everything for himself and not take anybody's help, I've told him so forty times. But it's all right for me to

get the pass," she added, "and I'll keep on doing it, too."

When Bruce came home he usually stayed at Margaret's, and each fresh glimpse of Bess convinced him anew of her beauty, her sweetness, and general irresistibleness. One year slipped by after another, and by the time Bess was sixteen Bruce began seriously to question the wisdom of his decision not to make love to her until he was in a position to support a wife. In another year she would go to college, and after grave deliberation through the summer he concluded that he would speak to her the next year, before she left; he couldn't trust her so far away without some definite pledge to hold her to him, and he himself would then have only a year of post-graduate work left between him and his profession. He settled the wisdom of this course beyond dispute, and stuck to it manfully all summer; but with the near approach of another separation he began to think a year a very long time to wait, especially when he had waited so long already. He spent one morning in the woods in deep cogitation, and when he turned back to the house the gleam in his eye and the set of his square jaw proclaimed the time of action upon him.

Bess was not to be found. Dick had gone to Fulton to see about some shipments of grain, and his mother had driven in with him for some shopping; Viry was helping Aunt Dilsey polish the silver, and Bruce had disappeared. Thus left to

her own resources, Bess had caught up a book and retired to the spring-house beech. She sat there, absorbed in the woes of Maggie Tulliver, until a splash on the page too high up for one of her own tears made her suddenly aware that a shower was not only coming, but had actually arrived. Reading would be out of the question in the dark little spring-house, and the barn was nearer than the house. She remembered the old delights of the hay-loft, which had been one of her retreats as a child, and scudding down the little valley was soon curled comfortably up in her old quarters and once more buried in her book.

Bruce, having failed to find her in the house, was searching the plantation over, and on his way to the spring-house beech was also driven by the shower to the shelter of the barn. Bess did not hear him come in, and he stood by the door waiting for the rain to pass, sure now that she must have returned to the house. Just as he was going out again a smothered sound from the hay-loft made him pause.

"Who's that?" he called.

"Mercy!" cried Bess, startled by the interruption, "are you there, Bruce? What's the matter?"

As she spoke there was a scrambling sound in the hay, and her face, flushed, and with eyes suspiciously red, peered at him over the mound of hay.

"There's nothing the matter if the girl I love

only cares for me," said Bruce, overjoyed and half frightened by his unexpected good fortune. "Let me come up there and tell you, Bess."

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" exclaimed Bess, with infinite scorn. She slid promptly down to the bottom of her hollow, and her voice came to him muffled by the hay. "Go away. Who wants to listen to maudlin nonsense about some idiot of a girl? I did think you had more sense, Bruce Carleton!"

"It's not maudlin," said Bruce, indignantly. "I tell you I'm coming up." He put one foot on the ladder.

Bess scrambled to the top of the hay again and looked down at him, her curls full of straws.

"Don't you dare to come up!" she said threateningly. "I'll throw the ladder down if you do." She caught it by the top rung and shook it. Bruce stopped.

"What are you reading?" he demanded. "Is it a love-story? You were crying, Bess."

"I don't care if I was. I've got a right to cry if I want to."

"Is it a love-story?" he insisted.

"It's 'The Mill on the Floss,' if you want to know; but I wasn't crying over any 'lovering'; it's this horrid brother of Maggie's that I can't stand. Now go off."

"But, Bess, I told you I love — a girl. I must tell you about it while we're by ourselves. I want to know what you think about it."

"I think you're a goose," said Bess, promptly, "and she's another. But I would like to know about it," she added more graciously, after a moment's reflection. "Is she a Nashville girl?"

"No," said Bruce, scornfully. "Nashville girls can't hold a candle to her. She lives down here."

"Here?" exclaimed Bess, new interest dawning in her eyes. "Oh, Bruce, is it that frizzle-headed Molly Caldwell?"

"Do you think I'm a fool?" demanded Bruce. "Why, Bess, you ought to know. Who could it be but you — the dearest, sweetest, prettiest girl in the world? I've loved you all my life, and I can't wait another minute to tell you so!"

Bess had disappeared. Her face had turned absolutely scarlet to the roots of her hair, and her eyes threatened to start from her head. After one apoplectic stare she had slid down into the hay again without a word.

Bruce leaned against the ladder, breathless and trembling.

"Bess!" he called after a moment's silence. There was no reply.

"Bess — darling!" he ventured again, half choked by his own audacity, yet thrilled by the consciousness that for once her saucy tongue was silenced. Even this boldness went unrebuked, and Bruce, after another pause, filled only by the beating of his own heart, sprang up the ladder and looked down into the hay. There was no one there.

"Bess!" he called, "where are you?"

There was no answer, and he groped about in the shadows in the corners of the loft, even thrusting his arms into the loose hay, and wondering more and more at her disappearance. Presently, far at the back of the loft, he discovered an open place above one of the stalls, and on the post which supported a cross-beam three or four long red-brown hairs swung from a nail and glinted golden in a ray of light that slipped through a crack in the boards. He sprang down, but the stalls were empty, and the door at the end stood wide open. He ran through it, and saw a blue gingham, surmounted by a waving mane of red-brown hair, running up the steps of the back porch, several hundred yards away. He started in pursuit, but when he reached the house Margaret had returned, and she and Bess were deep in bundles in the sitting room.

He was staying at Margaret's that week, and accepted the interruption of lunch as best he could, being determined to push the matter to an issue at once. He ate very little lunch, and appeared so gloomy that Margaret feared he was ill. Bess sat opposite to him, as usual, in the evident possession of her customary excellent appetite. She slipped out, however, as soon as lunch was over, while Bruce, following her, was stopped for a moment by Margaret. When he went to look for her she had again disappeared. A message sent her by Viry elicited the fact that

she was not in her room, and he satisfied himself that she was nowhere about the house. The hay-loft was empty, the beech deserted, and he was wandering disconsolately through the orchard, when among the leaves of an old apple tree he caught a gleam of blue. He ran to the spot and climbed into the fork of the tree. Bess was a little above him, halfway out on a limb too high above the ground to be jumped from.

"At last I have caught you!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, have you?" said Bess. She swung one foot defiantly.

Bruce felt that he had made a bad beginning, but it was too late to retreat. He made a not unskilful effort to retrieve himself.

"It means nothing, I know, to have you listen to what I say," he went on, humbly enough; "your ears can't do me much good if your soul shuts me out. But, Bess, I love you so much I must say it, just this once. I won't trouble you with it, I won't ask for anything — don't answer me," he went on hurriedly, in growing trepidation under her scornful eyes. "I just want you to know that I've loved you all my life, and I mean to work for you harder than ever girl was worked for before; and some day you will be my wife!"

Bess gave him a withering look. Perhaps his earnestness and the novelty of the situation might have awakened some small compassion for him in her hard young heart if that last masterful

declaration had not given compunction to the winds. She lifted herself a little on her perch to see more plainly the spring-house path; then, putting two fingers in her mouth as Bruce himself had taught her, she blew a signal whistle, shrill and clear.

"Viry!" she called, "Vi-*ry!*" She waved her handkerchief through the leaves and spoke to Bruce over her shoulder.

"She's running like a deer," she said calmly. "She'll be here in three minutes. If you want to go on making a goose of yourself she might as well have the fun of it too, and I'll keep her on that root as long as you stay here — trying to catch people in traps and *make* them listen to you!" she wound up in incoherent wrath.

"Bess," he began imploringly; but she flashed round on him.

"If you speak to me again, Bruce Carleton, I'll tell her every last thing you've said. I won't stand it another minute. You know I hate philandering, and every kind of foolishness there is, and yet there you sit and gabble, you horrid, selfish, disagreeable boy! — Good for you, Viry!" with a startling change of tone. "I believe in my soul you can run faster than I can at last. Jump down, Bruce, and I'll get down there and try. Wait and get your breath first, Viry. Hurry, Bruce!"

Bruce descended, sulkily enough, and Bess came after him as nimbly as a young monkey.

"What was it you wanted, Miss Bess?" asked Viry, her face alight with the joy of Bess's praise.

"Oh, I just wanted you to listen to one of Bruce's taradiddles," said Bess, carelessly; "it doesn't matter, though, because I want to run now; and besides, he's in a hurry to go to his uncle's. He's going to stay there to-night, and as soon as we run this race we'll go fishing. Is your breath all right? One, two, three —" they were off like the wind.

Bruce stood watching them, a portentous scowl upon his face. The two girls ran side by side, neither gaining on the other, across the orchard and down the hill. It would be a drawn race. But halfway down Viry tripped and fell, and Bess, checking herself with amazing swiftness, wheeled in a short turn and dropped beside her. Their laughter floated up the hill, and Bruce, hearing it, jammed his hat upon his head and took the path across the fields to his uncle's.

VIII

It was while Bruce was at Columbia and Dick in his senior year at Vanderbilt that the great discovery was made which poured wealth into the laps of the Jeness County farmers, transformed the quiet village near Margaret's home into a bustling, mushroom-like town, and thrilled Fulton itself with the coursing tides of a new commercial life. Phosphate deposits, wonderfully rich, had been found a year or two before in Sumpter County, and had set the whole region wild with dreams of untold wealth. The discovery had come about almost by accident. A Sumpter County man, finding some black shale on his farm, and believing it to be coal, sent a specimen to Nashville for examination; and the chemist pronounced a bit of rock clinging to its under side to be phosphate of a higher grade than any yet discovered in the United States. Men and money poured in to develop the mines, and all middle Tennessee was in a ferment. Some of the Jeness County men, smitten with the thirst for sudden riches, sacrificed the fertile lands which had long yielded such sure and abundant returns to purchase a share, however small, of this hidden, mysterious, unsuspected

wealth laid ages ago on the old sea-floor, and waiting, as power has always waited, until men should grow wise enough to find and use it.

Much of the land in Jeness County was thrown upon the market, and Margaret, remembering Dick's still steadfast determination to be a farmer, bought in that lying adjacent to her own already large holdings, until she became the greatest landowner in the county. Then, in Dick's senior year, came the amazing discovery that Jeness County itself was one great bed of phosphate, as much richer than Sumpter phosphate as Sumpter phosphate was richer than that of all the world.

The wildest excitement followed. Mine after mine was opened. Hundreds of negro laborers, swelling to thousands, flocked in and were settled in rough camps around the different mines. The village, with its handful of houses and two or three hundred inhabitants, was deluged with incoming white men of every possible grade. Northern capitalists came down to investigate, and remained to make permanent investments. Young Southerners, eager, alert, with no capital beyond their brains and the will to work, sought an opening in this new, rich field. Storekeepers came, drummers, dealers in everything necessary and unnecessary, and sharpers and scalawags, ready to prey on the ignorant and weak.

The one little hotel was taxed beyond the pos-

sibility of finding space for its customers, though half a dozen men slept in a room, and any number of them in the passages. A new hotel was put up, pretentious brick stores and offices followed, and dwelling-houses of every grade. Town lots were sold at preposterous prices. Sometimes, after a house had been built, the land proved so rich that the lot would be stripped and mined, the house standing on tall pillars, like stilts, above the pit where men and mules were at work.

The whole face of the earth was rent and changed. Men knew at last the secret of the inexhaustible fertility of the region, where generation after generation had garnered the richest harvests from ground which needed no fertilizing. It was the despised "sand-rock," as the farmers called it, kicking it contemptuously or resentfully aside as they turned it up in the long furrows, which had kept the soil renewed with virgin strength, and which held within itself new power for the exhausted lands of the world.

To Margaret, at first, the whole transformation came with the shock of a desecration. Driving one day to Fulton she saw old Mr. Lambert's wheat fields, which had been the pride of the county for years, trampled and laid waste, the rich green of the growing wheat trodden into the mire or buried under piles of earth as the men stripped off the over-burden of soil from the beds of rock; and the long line of carts, filled with the earth loosened and thrown aside by the

heavy scrapers, toiled up out of the deepening cuts to pour their contents on the green life of the fields and crush it out in darkness. On her way home she passed the family burying-ground of the Bruces, not far from the fine old house. Here, too, the fields were torn with ghastly wounds. Up to the very edge of the little fence which guarded the graves the mines were opened, and men worked with pick and shovel in the mad thirst for gold, as if gold were the one thing needful, and that quiet spot on the hillside held neither warning nor promise of the door which swings wide for all mankind, nor of the difference between possessions and life.

For herself, she was content with what she had, and was minded to give Nature her own way, taking the increase of her fields as God gave it. She did not care for great wealth for herself, and she feared it for the children, especially for Bess. The girl's danger, she thought, was already great enough, in that she was a woman, and beautiful, and young. If in addition to all this she should become known as a great heiress, what chance of happiness would she have?

As her daughter grew older, Margaret had found it increasingly difficult to attain a point where she was willing for the child not merely to live her own life, but to bear her share of the suffering and discipline which life inevitably brings. She had long accepted her own lot as purely good. If her old happiness had been slain

before her eyes, something nobler and better had taken its place. Her life was not what, as a girl, she had hoped it would be; if the girl could have seen the woman's life it would have broken her heart, it was so different, so changed: but looking back she saw that it was through the broken heart of the girl, and the wreck of the girl's ideals, that she had to pass to reach the ground whereon she now stood firm. It was not merely that truth was better than illusion — she had always known that; what she had learned was that whatever the guise or disguise of truth, the heart of it, for those who have courage to penetrate to its heart, is love and compassion, and the power to bear and to serve. The gift of pain she had found to be the true second sight, and her inner vision had cleared until she saw in every need a bond that united her to her fellows. It was one of her joys that she owed this life, with its constantly deepening insight and delight, to Philip, her husband, who had wronged her and been forgiven. Out of their life together, and their pain, had come good, and only good, for both of them at the last.

But that Bess should ever learn her lessons in any such hard way — the mere thought of it made her writhe with pain. She wished passionately at times, that Bess might never marry. In her saner moments she knew that after all marriage — not an ideal marriage, but the ordinary marriage, with its admixture of good and

evil, happiness and pain — is the best of all possible lots; and there were even times when, lifted to some mountain-top of vision, she ceased for the moment to be afraid. She saw, at least, that there was a place where one might stand and not be afraid, though she herself might never reach it; a place where the laws of life in their working were laid open to the sight, forming the souls of men, shaping, breaking, remaking, lifting, lifting through the ages; and above the laws the Law, infinite, all-pervading, never to be defeated in the end. In the light of that vision she could trust even Bess's life to slip out into the current when the time should come, and be borne whither it should be carried.

But for the most part this trust was beyond her; and she wavered between a desire to see her, before her death, a well-established old maid, and a desire to see her married to some man whom she could trust. She realized the doubtfulness of a girl's becoming inspired with a romantic attachment for the man whom her mother's judgment selects; but she nevertheless hoped that if she kept her own judgment well in the background Bess might some day look upon Bruce Carleton with eyes of favor. She knew him as she knew her own children, and trusted his honor and steadfastness entirely. She had been doubly pleased when Bess shamefacedly told her of Bruce's extraordinary conduct at the barn and in the apple tree — pleased with Bruce

for caring for her, and with Bess for laughing at him. Watching him since, she guessed that his love changed only to pass from a boy's love into a man's; and she was in no hurry for Bess's heart to awaken. One of the cardinal points of her creed was that it did a man no harm to wait, or to find his wooing difficult; but she wished for his success in the end. If she grasped now at this sudden wealth it might endanger all her hopes. Bess would be set on a pinnacle — a pinnacle of dollars, of all things — a target for every fortune-hunter who heard her name, and might give her heart to some man who cared only for her money. No, she would not open the mines, nor sell the land. Dick cared as little for money as she, and Bess would be content with whatever they decided. They would change nothing; and when Bruce and Bess were safely married, she would give the child her portion to do with as she would, while she and Dick went on in the old life together.

And it was Dick, the student, the recluse, Dick the unworldly, the imaginative, who upset all these plans, and opened the great Lawton mines, and scarred the fields, and coined money in dazzling heaps. He graduated in June, and a week afterward, as he and his mother sat on the shady side of the veranda at home, she began to speak of his further course of study elsewhere.

"I only want one more year, mother," he

said; "I am not going abroad at all. My life has been settled for me by the discovery of this phosphate. After my year at the North I must come home and open the mines."

His mother looked at him in amazement.

"We need not open the mines, Dick," she said. "It will be impossible for you to live the life you have planned if you undertake so great a business. We can go on as if the phosphate did not exist. We do not need it or want it."

"The world needs it," he answered, "and it belongs to the world. We have no right to withhold it."

"We need not give it yet. I am afraid for Bess, when she finishes school, to enter life as a great heiress. Wait until Bess is married or decides not to marry. Then we can sell the land and somebody else can dig out the world's phosphate for it."

Dick laughed softly, and bent down to kiss her hand.

"You are the most delightful mother in the world," he said. "Just when a fellow concludes that your wisdom is infallible and begins to stand in awe of you, you bring out a delicious bit of nonsense like that! To think of your playing ostrich!"

"Ostrich?" she inquired, one pair of gray eyes smiling into the other. "I don't understand, wise sir."

"Do you think Bess won't be known as an

heiress because you keep her fortune hid in the ground? Everybody in Tennessee knows of this great tract of land you own, and that it is the very centre and heart of the richest deposits of phosphate yet found. Why, I heard two men talking about it on the train the other day; they knew the whole story."

"Drummers!" said Margaret; "they don't count. I suppose they'd just been to Fulton."

"No; they had never been down this way before. They heard it in St. Louis."

"I never thought of that," she said, after a moment's silence. "I don't see how I am to protect the child."

"Her being your child is her protection," he answered. "You have taught us to care for the real things, and to find them under outside appearances. When I think of you, I know there's no need to be afraid for Bess."

Margaret sighed.

"But for yourself, Dick?" she asked presently. "You said you hated business."

"Yes. But I said if a thing I didn't like came to me, I'd try not to shirk. And, mother," he went on with that hesitating shyness which came to him when he told her his inmost thoughts, "this hasn't come to me as business, exactly. It is like a symphony or a great poem. When Bruce and I took that tramp last summer up through the mountains we saw those mountain farms; just the poorest thin soil that ever was,

and the scantiest crops. The men are gaunt and bent with work, and the women and children are pitiful. Some of the land doesn't yield over six or eight bushels of wheat to the acre. Then, scattered all in among those farms are some whose owners use phosphate; just a worm fence between them, and it looked like a different world. The homes were different; you could tell it most in the children, and in the comforts in the houses, and in the books. That's what phosphate does. It means relief to men and women broken and old with work, and a better chance for the children; more bread for the world's markets, more cotton, more everything."

Margaret looked at him with kindling eyes.

"I don't see why a man can't work for things like that," Dick went on. "It makes life a lot more interesting. It seems to me men kill themselves with narrowness when they work just for the personal return. The other way you have a background for life, and a horizon. Think of the background for this phosphate; the ages of preparation, the forces, the laws controlling the forces, and the waiting since ages before man existed. And atoms like us can unlock the mystery and set force free to be transformed into life! The long chain is broken if we step out of our place and shirk."

His face, fine and delicate, with the brow of a dreamer and the lips of an ascetic, shone with an inner light. Suddenly he blushed to his ears.

"Why should I talk to you about such things?" he said. "You have known them all along. I repeat what you teach me as if I had found it out for myself. It is because you have made it so real to me, mother; you live that way."

Margaret did not answer. Her eyes were on the distant hills as she drank deep the cup of her reward: her son had seen the vision of the Law, and had understood it through his mother's daily life.

Presently Dick began to speak in another tone.

"There will be more than one man can possibly do, mother, and I want Bruce to help me. He told me this morning he had promised to work for his uncle this summer, but the arrangement is only for three months yet, and you can get him to come to you in the fall. He could begin the mining this winter while I am away. We must manage somehow to make Bruce's fortune out of this, but he's such a stiff-necked old heathen it will be right hard to do."

"Go over and find him, dear, and bring him to dinner; we can see about it this evening. But, my son, do you realize that the phosphate is only half the problem? There's the money it will bring in to be reckoned with."

Dick laughed.

"They say there's poetry in everything if you can only get at the heart of it; and there cer-

tainly ought to be poetry in power, and that's what money is. But I'll leave that to you and Bess. Her head will be full of notions, and I expect yours is already."

He stooped to kiss her and went down the steps, across the yard, whistling light-heartedly. Margaret watched him until he disappeared. Philip had been troubled for Dick only less than for Viry; Bess's future he had apparently taken for granted. He would be satisfied with Dick; he would say that she had done her work well. But Viry?

Since the day when Viry had stood before her with crimson cheeks and flaming eyes, an image of incarnate passion, and cried, "I hate you! I hate you!" the girl had held herself aloof. She would open her heart neither to Margaret nor to Dilsey; nor would she associate with other negroes. She was a beautiful girl — or would have been but for those strange, disquieting eyes, and for the moody, dissatisfied look which deepened continually upon her face. Once or twice Margaret, looking at her suddenly, had surprised Viry's eyes fixed upon herself with an expression of cold contempt. She groped in vain in her own consciousness for any cause for such feeling, and she knew it was useless to try to fathom the reasons in the girl's mind. So far she had utterly failed with Viry; and to fail here, she felt, was to fail in everything, for it was here that her life was put to its crucial test.

Sometimes she despaired. There seemed no way to get at the girl, no natural emotions or longings by which to thread the labyrinth of her reserve. Her love for Bess, indeed, remained, the one living thing that stirred beneath the cold snows of her indifference, and on that Margaret fed her hope. Where love was life was; and to that living germ all things were possible.

IX

Bruce had accepted his uncle's offer to take charge of his phosphate mines for the summer simply to be near Bess. He had had a better offer to remain in New York, but the place was only a temporary one, so that he felt justified in refusing it to accept Mr. Bruce's somewhat niggardly proposal. He had determined, once for all, that he would never again speak to Bess of love; the phosphate had settled that. But he saw no reason why he should not see her as often as he could until she married, as she would probably do within a few years. After that he would go to the ends of the earth and stay there.

He had always known that he must begin life with nothing but his brain and his two hands, and that Bess would inherit a comfortable independence; but there was no discrepancy in their fortunes which he might not hope to wipe out in a few years. When the news of the great discovery came, all that was changed in a flash. The young fellow was morbidly independent. He had not eaten for nothing, all these years, the bread of a cold and grudging

charity. His mother's last letter he knew by heart, and his resentment of his uncle's angry contempt for her poverty-stricken independence was the slow growth of many years. From his boyhood he had determined to use the first money he should earn to repay the old man for every mouthful he had eaten under his roof. He had, indeed, inherited his full share of the Bruce pride as well as that of the Peytons, and all the circumstances of his life had thrown undue emphasis on his natural tendencies. Bess herself, in her stanch approval of his attitude toward his uncle, had done much to confirm him in that attitude, not merely toward him, but toward all the world. To make his own way, asking no favors and accepting none, was the starting-point of his whole scheme of life; and so the knowledge of Bess's sudden riches came to him as a staggering blow. He knew that all the joy and promise of his life were bound up in her, but he would not be dependent on any woman's bounty, and least of all on hers. At the worst, a man should meet a woman on equal terms; he could not stoop to receive money at her hands. There had been no struggle in his mind in regard to his course of action: circumstances had set her beyond the pale of honorable hope, and he did not for a moment question what must follow. He took his pride quietly enough and labelled it with a number of fine names — honor, and love, and self-sacrifice — and set it up in the innermost

temple of his will, where he offered incense before it daily.

When Margaret sent for him he agreed at once to undertake the opening of her mines. Their only difference was on the question of payment. It was a big undertaking, and worth a good salary, which he accepted; but he refused utterly to accept also a commission on the rock mined, or to buy, as she proposed, part of her new land for what she had paid for it, giving his notes in payment. These were just ways of putting his hand in their pockets, he said, and he had no mind to rob his friends — or to accept any more charity, either, he added with some bitterness. And so she was forced to leave matters.

He was to begin work as soon as his time with his uncle was out, and was to live with Margaret, partly to be near his work, chiefly to bear her company and give her protection while Dick and Bess were away.

The time came for their going before they realized that the summer had slipped away. Viry went back to college first, and Bess and Dick left together a week later. They were in the highest spirits over being near one another all winter, and over their mother's promise to come to them for Christmas instead of bringing them back home.

Bruce moved over the day before they left, and entered on his new work the first of the month. Before mining could begin, the houses

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for the negro laborers must be built, and the sheds for the kilns; the simple machinery necessary must be set up, an office and shipping depot erected, and a branch line built from the railroad to the mines. The winter was consumed in these preparations, and the heavy rains of the late wet spring delayed the opening of the mines.

The rock, lying in blanket form, and covered only by a few feet of earth, must be mined from the surface, the over-burden of soil being loosened by deep ploughs and scrapers, and carried off in carts: and in heavy rains the earth not only becomes an unworkable mire, but the soft, porous rock, broken by picks and exposed to the weather, absorbs so much moisture that the expense of drying it is materially increased. It was not until summer was almost come that work was at last begun.

Bruce had protested against Margaret's doing too much for the men, or making their quarters too comfortable. The houses were warm and dry, better built than the ordinary "shacks" to be found at the mines, but that was all.

"These darkies aren't like the ones you've been used to all your life, Aunt Margaret," he said. "The men like Ebeneezer are not going to leave their homes and rush off into the phosphate country to earn a dollar a day. The bulk of these fellows are like the bulk of the white men who went to the Klondyke at first, or to California;

they are the ones who have failed at home and have nothing to tie them there. Of course a man may fail through no fault of his own; but as a rule the men who crowd into a new industry like this have some deficiency or other, and it isn't often to their credit. These darkies are a mighty poor lot. The first thing they need is to be made to work, and to be allowed to suffer when they don't. Don't start them with any notion that you're going to 'do' for them; it will ruin them and your mines."

"I know it, Bruce; but it's dreadfully hard to live up to it when I have so much and they so little."

"Give them a chance to help themselves," said Bruce. "Uncle is so set in his ways he wouldn't let me try any experiments this summer, but the way the men are paid is all wrong. In all the mines they get a dollar a day, whether they get out much rock or little. Of course if a fellow gets too trifling they fire him; but the whole tendency is toward the level of the poorest workmen. I want to pay them by the ton."

"Why wouldn't your uncle allow it?"

Bruce laughed.

"You know how uncle is. I suppose he's the only unreconstructed man in this county. He thinks the only way to make a 'nigger' work is to drive him with a whip, and since you can't do that, you can't do anything, and must pay what he asks and take what work he chooses to

give you. It's rank nonsense. I'll give them a chance, and if they don't work, they'll go."

"What will you do?"

"Pay them by the ton. They can make fifty cents a day at it if they want to; but if they choose to work they can make two or three dollars. I've figured it all out, and the rock won't cost a cent more to mine — not as much, I believe. It will weed out no end of idlers; but in the long run I believe enough men will answer to a spur like that for me to fill the quarters with the kind we want, especially if we get a good many married men."

The mines had not been open long when Bess and Dick came home. Margaret had been with them for some time. Bess had made several new friends this year, partly through Dick, who had made a desperate effort to get out of his natural reserve; and partly through Margaret's visits at Christmas and in the spring, when she had looked up some old Northern acquaintances who had introduced her and Bess to a number of pleasant people.

Every one whom she met was attracted to the girl, and two or three men had tried to make love to her, to their speedy and utter discomfiture. She was rapidly approaching womanhood, but there was a deal of the child in her yet: and one of its strongest tokens was a very stony heart, with a sovereign contempt for "maudlin ways," as she still called all things

bordering on sentiment. She came back home as eager for the quiet and freedom of the farm as ever, and celebrated her return by climbing to her old "roost" in the apple tree, with Viry and a little bag of Parralee's tea-cakes, as soon as she had watched Bruce and Dick out of sight across the fields.

But climbing was one thing and sitting still quite another. She and Viry had seen nothing of the mines as yet, nor even of the spring-house and the fishing hole. She ran back into the house to beguile Aunt Dilsey into giving them a picnic supper under the old beech, instead of a formal dinner in the house, and then she and Viry set out upon their rounds.

They went past the quarters first, where three or four chocolate-colored bits of humanity were contentedly making and eating mud-pies.

"Aren't they cunning, Viry?" cried Bess. "I wish I'd brought my kodak — I will to-morrow. I wonder how many of them there are here?"

"I don't know," said Viry, disdainfully; "swarms, I suppose."

Bess stopped suddenly without answering, as the sound of coughing and crying fell upon her ears.

"Why, that child has the whooping-cough!" she exclaimed. "Let's go see."

"How can you tell?" asked Viry, hanging back.

"Bless you, I've got two ears," said Bess;

"and I saw whole regiments of them with it at the settlement this spring. It almost broke up the kindergarten for a while."

She stopped at the door whence the sound proceeded, and saw a negro woman sitting just within it, holding in her arms an exhausted-looking child, little more than a skeleton.

"Poor little chap," she said, bending over it; "he looks pretty sick. What doctor have you had for him?"

"He don' need no doctor," said the woman, vastly flattered by Bess's attention. "I done got er roach."

"Got a what?"

"Er roach. Dar he in de bottle." She picked up a small bottle with a rag stopper and shook it to turn the insect within. "I done sent ter Fulton atter 'im. He plumb dead," she added in a satisfied tone.

"What on earth did you want with it?" demanded Bess.

"Hit's de bes' t'ing dey is fer de 'huppin'-cough," said the woman, glad to air her knowledge. "In co'se I greases de chile's heels wid taller, too; but hit don' do much good less'n you gits er roach en name hit fer de chile en put hit in er bottle. Ef de roach don' die, de chile will; but ef de roach die, de chile gits well. En de roach done dead."

"I should think he would be, without air or water or food! That's no conjuring! But the

baby'll go too if you aren't careful. I'm going to send mother down here with a doctor; and next time you bottle up your roach and grease with tallow if you want to, but don't forget to send for the doctor, too. Come on, Viry, I must run over and see the washer, and then we'll go tell mother."

They went on across the fields to where the washer stood, a great perforated iron cylinder lifted high above the ground, with a stream of water pumped through it as it revolved. Just below it narrow-gauge tracks from the different places where mining was going on converged into one, which ran up on a high trestle above the washer. After the large pieces of rock had been taken from the diggings the smaller pieces, mingled with earth, were loaded into the trams and pulled by mules to the foot of the trestle, whence they were hauled up by a windlass and emptied into the washer. Here the dirt was carried off by the water, and the cleaned rock fell under one of the great sheds to be fired and dried. The empty cars were allowed to run down the trestle, drawn by their own weight. Bess and Viry climbed up on the trestle and watched them drawn up, emptied, and sent spinning down again, until Bess's love of adventure got the better of her dignity.

"Stop a minute," she said to the negro who turned the windlass. "Come, Viry, jump in and we'll ride down."

"She go mighty fas', missy," said the man, grinning.

"I know it," said Bess, climbing in. "Now let go."

They flew down the long trestle, laughing and gasping. The men at the foot grinned as they went by, spinning along the main track and slackening speed gradually as they approached one of the sheds. Just as they stopped and were climbing down, Bruce came out from under the shed. He looked thoroughly shocked.

"What on earth are you doing, Bess?" he demanded. "One of those cars jumped the track yesterday. What did that fool let you get in there for?"

"Let me!" laughed Bess. "I'd like to know how he could have stopped me?"

"Then I'll stop you myself," said Bruce, incautiously. "You mustn't ride in it again. It's not only dangerous, it's improper; you can't run about and do all sorts of madcap things as if you were still a child and the place were not full of strange negroes. You must remember you are nineteen years old."

"Yes, grandfather," said Bess, a flash in her eyes which belied the meekness of her words, "and I'll remember that that's my mother's trestle, and I'll ride on it till she tells me not."

"Well, I'll see that she does that pretty soon," he retorted. "I can keep you from running risks about the mines if I am only a hired employee!"

"Bruce!" exclaimed Bess, and stopped short, too shocked for a moment for speech. Then her eyes flamed. "Bruce Carleton, I wouldn't have believed it was in you to say so mean a thing. I think you owe every one of us an apology, from mother down. Come, Viry." She turned her back upon him and marched off toward the house.

Bruce looked after her with a dark flush rising under his tanned skin. It was a mean thing, and he was both ashamed and surprised that he had said it. The golden barrier between himself and Bess was making him suspicious and ill-tempered; he must set a closer watch upon himself.

The two girls went back to the house, where Viry settled herself upon the steps of the side veranda to mend a rent in one of Bess's summer frocks. Bess, after telling her mother of the sick child, strayed round the corner of the piazza and threw herself into a hammock near by. She swung to and fro in silence for a while, and then, with her usual sudden change of mood, sat up, her face full of eager interest.

"What is it, Miss Bess?" asked Viry.

"Why, I have a genuine idea," said Bess; "do make a note of it! What's the use of your going off somewhere to teach when you finish college when there's a whole regiment of children right down there in the quarters? I'm going to ask mother to put up a little schoolhouse out here,

and you won't have any school superintendent or trustees to bother with, but just me! And Saturdays we'll have a sewing-school, and I'll help you teach them to sew. I just love little darkies; they're so cunning."

"Do you think so?" asked Viry. "I despise them."

Her face clouded, but only for a moment. Nothing could quite obscure the fact that Bess was planning for her, and wanted to keep her at home.

"You wouldn't despise them if you'd seen some of the other kinds," said Bess, with conviction; "some of those Eye-talians, as the old apple-woman on the settlement corner called them, or the little Jews in New York, for instance. I don't mean they aren't interesting, and pretty, too, after they learn to wash; but they do look so weazened and old and unchild-like, they break your heart. The colored children take life easy and have a good time, like kittens or puppies, as children should. They look so good-natured and contented."

"Kittens and puppies!" said Viry, scornfully. "That's all they are. What's the sense of teaching them anything?"

"Why, Viry," said Bess, in astonishment, "I thought you wanted to teach."

"I don't want to starve," said Viry, shortly. "The money my father gave me was only enough to educate me. I don't suppose it would have

given me the kind of education I have if Miss Margaret hadn't pieced it out — at least I think she did it. He was a fine gentleman, and I suppose he sent his white children to college, if he had any, but he meant me to learn to cook and sew. I should be thankful that he did anything for me, I suppose. I'm just a 'nigger,' you know."

"Don't, Viry," said Bess, helplessly. "I don't think about you that way. You're different."

"I know I'm different," she replied slowly; "that's the dreadful part. I'm —" she shut her lips resolutely. She had never spoken of these things to Bess before, and to do so seemed to widen the gulf between them. She sat in silence, pressing her hands together under the white dress in her lap.

"Did you know your father, Viry?" asked Bess, presently. "Was he good to you?"

"If he had been good to me, I would never have been born," she answered. "I don't know anything about him except that my mother told the woman she left me with that he was a fine gentleman. He was a devil!" she exclaimed with sudden passion. "Why couldn't he think what life would mean to me before he cursed me with it? What right —" she checked herself again.

"He must have thought afterwards, and been sorry, Viry," said Bess, gently. "I am sure he was sorry, and he meant to help you the best he knew how. That must have been why he gave

you the money. Does it seem quite so hard to you if he were sorry?"

For answer Viry burst into tears.

"Miss Bess, I ought to be glad I'm alive just to know you," she sobbed. "It's the only thing I am glad for."

She sprang up, her work over her arm, and started into the house, trying, as she went, to still the quivering of her lips. Bess rose to follow her, but she shook her head.

"Don't," she implored. "Let me go."

Bess sank back into the hammock, shivering in the warm June afternoon. She felt as if a chasm cleft to the lowest pit yawned suddenly beneath her. Her own happiness seemed monstrous; she felt ashamed of the very richness of her life, its love, its freedom, its radiant promise. How could she, who had everything, comfort Viry, who had nothing? It had been brutal even to try. She lay in helpless misery until she felt tears dripping from her eyes, a consciousness that sent her flying to her room lest her weakness should be discovered.

Perhaps her tears for Viry softened her heart toward Bruce. When they went to supper under the beech he found her in the rarest of all her moods, as gentle as she was beautiful. He felt an added need for keeping a firm grip on himself, and was so occupied in doing it that to her he seemed cold and unfriendly. She was in the humor for any amount of penitence. She had

made Bruce feel that she intended to twit him with his poverty — Bruce, of all people! She was half ready to cry again at the thought. When, as soon as the meal was over, he announced that he must go to the office for something he had forgotten, she sprang to her feet and asked him to take her with him.

"Why, of course," he said, his heart giving a sudden thump as he looked at her, standing in her white dress in the evening light, with that new softness on her lovely face. Then recovering himself, he turned to Margaret.

"Won't you and Dick come too, Aunt Margaret? It's a beautiful evening for a walk."

Margaret shook her head.

"Dick can go," she said, "but you must leave me at the house. I'm too old to get over my long journey so soon."

At the house Dick seated her on the porch and dropped on the step at her feet.

"You two go on," he said to Bess; "I'd rather stay here."

"Now they'll sit there and make love to each other till we come back," laughed Bess, running down the steps again. "What do you suppose will happen, Bruce, when Dick falls in love with some girl?"

"Why, he'll be in love, I suppose," said Bruce, absently, his eyes turned resolutely toward the fields.

"Of course he'll be in love, goose; I told you

that much, myself." Then, remembering her reason for coming with him, she plunged into her apology before her good resolution should have time to cool.

"I'm sorry I was so cross this afternoon, Bruce; but indeed I seemed crosser than I was, or you never would have misunderstood me so. I know I have lots of faults, and I do dearly love to tease and nag, but I wouldn't think what you thought I did — I'd rather be dead. I must be a meaner girl than I ever suspected, or you wouldn't have thought for one minute I could be so hateful."

She stopped, breathless and rosy red, her eyes, shamed and penitent, on his face. There were never any half measures with Bess; she might not often think herself in fault, but when she did, she was the chief of sinners.

Bruce had never felt her so beautiful or so dangerous. He permitted himself barely a glance in her direction.

"I ought to apologize myself," he said constrainedly. "I shouldn't have said what I did. I forgot myself — and my position. I was — things had been going wrong, and I took it out on the first annoyance that came along. There isn't any excuse."

He stood in awkward silence, with a miserable sense of clumsiness, and of having saved his honor at the expense of Bess's good opinion.

Bess stiffened.

"I am sorry to have been the annoyance," she said quietly; "but since you understand that I intended no offence, we need not worry about it any more. Good-night."

She was back through the gate before he could move to open it for her, and he stood looking after her as wretched as a young man in love can well be. If she had quarrelled with him, after her usual fashion, it would have been an untold comfort. For her to treat him, in the face of such provocation, with dignity and grave politeness marked a relation between them as distant as it was new. He walked slowly on with a dawning consciousness of what it would mean to make good, hour by hour, in his daily life, the act of will by which he had long ago renounced his hopes. He had thought of that determination as a sacrifice of the greatest cost; he began to see how cheap and easy it was compared to the finished sacrifice wrought out in deeds through a lifetime.

Bess did not go back to the porch, but seated herself in the lawn-swing at the side of the house. She was surprised and indignant to find herself more hurt than angry. Bruce had seemed changed last summer, but she had scouted the thought as treason; now she knew it was true — he was changed. Perhaps — her cheeks burned at the thought — perhaps he was afraid she remembered his nonsense in the barn that day, and feared that she might think him still in that

silly frame of mind. Her eyes blazed. She would show him that at least she was not a fool who thought every man she came across was in love with her. She would never annoy him with her attentions again!

She kept her word, and in the keeping of it proved herself no longer a child, but a woman. Her manner to Bruce was so easy, friendly, and unembarrassed that Margaret never suspected the change which the young man for whom it was made daily felt more keenly. Like everything else which she undertook Bess practised the art of avoidance with signal success, and achieved that height of diplomacy where no diplomacy appears to exist. Try as he might, Bruce found no opening through which to reach her, and did not see her alone again before she went back to college.

Her last two years at school passed rapidly. To Bruce they brought a treadmill round of work which grew more and more irksome to him as his inward chafing against his fate centred his thoughts more and more upon himself, and cut his work off from its world-wide relationships to cramp it within the narrow limits of his own lot in life. Unconsciously the values of life were changing with him. He envied Dick the wealth he was so heedless of, and raged against his own poverty. The harder he worked the higher the barrier rose between him and his love; that his hands should be set

to build it seemed the irony of fate. He hated money with increasing bitterness, and longed for it with all his soul. Like every man absorbed in his own affairs, he hardened toward those about him. That he was the best manager of a phosphate mine in the county every one admitted; no mines were so economically run, none paid such wages, none had such workmen, none poured such streams of gold into their owner's lap; every edge cut and every lick told. But he had lost something of his old charm, even to his friends; and the negroes who worked for him, while they learned to rest secure in his justice, served him far more in fear than in love. For this very reason, perhaps, they worked for him as they would never have worked for Dick, and treasured his rare praise with pride.

Dick, for his part, was finding new interest in his work with every day. He left the mines to Bruce, but the connection of the mines with the outside world was under his own control, and as it broadened his interest in it broadened, and poetry was still at the heart of life. Nothing was lacking to him but that Bess should be at home again to stay, and in one more year that too would come to pass. She had finished college, but Margaret had promised to take her abroad for a year, and in August they were to sail.

Margaret had delayed their departure that she might see the completion of the schoolhouse which had been built for Viry, and make sure that

everything was ready for her to begin her work in the fall. Aunt Dilsey was to be left as housekeeper, with Viry to give her whatever help she might need. To Aunt Dilsey, also, Margaret committed her own work of looking after such of the sick among the negroes in the quarters as needed especial attention, whom Bruce was to report to her as he had always done to Margaret herself.

Bess had come home after commencement feeling that if Bruce had been elsewhere she would have found it a relief; for the longer she pursued her policy of friendly indifference the more difficult it became. Bruce, however, had long since fallen in with it, and rarely sought to be alone with her, or to attract her notice in any way. To her shame and scorn she found it impossible to care as little for him as he apparently did for her. If he had remained unchanged, her fancy might have strayed to some one of the men, younger or older, who surrounded her with admiration; but the mere fact that this one man, formerly her slave, was entirely indifferent to her, set him apart from, and, by the usual feminine reasoning, above the others. Devoted, he had floated in and out of her consciousness as idly as seaweed floats on the shore; but indifferent, she thought of him much. Part of her overflowing delight in her prospective trip was her expectation that it would drive him quite out of her mind; before she came back, he would, she was sure, be as little to her as she was now to him.

X

To her work as a teacher Viry brought intelligence of a high order, an education far beyond that of the ordinary white teacher in the country schools, and an utter lack of enthusiasm which foredoomed her to failure from the start. She did not intend to fail or shirk; she was as determined as Bruce himself to give money's worth in return for her salary, no matter how distasteful the giving of it might be; and as a matter of fact, the learning of books progressed as well in the school at the quarters as in most schools of a like kind. A certain round of work was faithfully gone through, a certain amount of drudgery required and performed; but at first there had been hope of something more. The dusky little pupils had long viewed Viry from afar with admiration and awe. Her beauty, her dainty dress, the reputation of her learning and her haughtiness, coupled with the amazing fact that she "wuz des a nigger, too," had made her in their eyes a creature of romance; and when it was announced that this goddess would so far descend from her pinnacle as to open a school for their benefit, a school where they could see and hear her, and perhaps touch her pretty clothes

every day, they were thrown into great excitement, which communicated itself, more or less, to their mothers. Dresses were washed, rents mended or pinned up, a grand rewrapping of woolly pigtails took place; and the opening day saw the schoolroom filled with squirming, restless little creatures, the whites of their eager eyes shining in their black faces, their teeth gleaming through embarrassed smiles, as they looked at "Miss Viry" expectantly.

Viry stood on the platform behind her desk, clad in the simplest of dark skirts and white shirt-waists, but with the carriage and style of the high-born women whose blood flowed in her veins. Her beautiful hair rippled about her low, broad forehead, and covered the tips of her little ears; her lips were held in calm, determined lines, and the pallor of her olive skin was more pronounced than usual. Her strange blue eyes looked at the children with an unflinching, unsmiling expression, before which their own smiles faded, and their eyes dropped uneasily. She went through with the day's routine with a cold, determined patience which sent the children home chilled and vaguely resentful. None of them had dared to touch her.

For herself, she had gone back to her pretty room in Aunt Dilsey's cabin and thrown herself upon the bed in sheer physical exhaustion after the day's self-control. In her years as a student she had taken refuge from her fellow-pupils in

her books, and in a more or less limited association with her white teachers; and always, when she thought of the end of her own school days, the main thing had been the hope of being near Bess again. The time she must spend away from her and at work, she had, as far as possible, dropped out of her mind: sufficient unto the day would be the evil thereof; it was only hope which had looked into the future, searching for something wherewith to make the present more endurable.

But now Bess was gone for a whole long year, and Viry's life-work had begun. The interest of learning was cut off — for it never occurred to her that in the hearts and minds of these little black folk might be hidden a kind of knowledge new to her, and as interesting in its way as what she had found in books: she was separated from all her mental equals: there was no one near her for whom she cared at all except old Dilsey, whom she regarded much as Bess did, but to whom, notwithstanding her real affection for her, she could never speak freely of either her thoughts or her emotions: she was shut up to a lifelong association with unkempt negro children.

She might have borne that, she felt, if it had come to her of her own free choice. She had been quick to see and to appreciate the unselfish devotion which had moved her white teachers to spend themselves for an alien and inferior race: she could have done that, too. But to her, she

thought bitterly, even the comfort of sacrifice was denied. She was to spend herself, not because a higher nature freely bent to the burdens and ignorance of a lower one, but because, being a negro, she belonged with negroes, and earned her bread among her kind as a matter of course. And yet she was white, she was white! She clenched her hands with a tearless groan. Why had this curse come upon her? It did not fall on every mongrel, she told herself once more, in voiceless misery. There had been mulatto girls at school — plenty of them; but they were not like her. The sight of them had always sent a sick chill to her heart, as it might to a cripple's heart to see another deformity like his own; but she had nerved herself, again and again, to speak to one and another of them of these awful things, and they had scarcely understood her at all. They were proud of their white blood, many of them, and of the superior intelligence with which it had dowered them. They were more or less contemptuous of their black associates, but after all it was a kindly, tolerant contempt; and so long as they were allowed to lead they did not object to a black following. They had the white blood, but it merely served to quicken the black nature; while for her the black blood had poisoned a white woman's life.

She had not understood it as a child. She had puzzled, herself, over her anger at the attempts at intimacy of her colored playmates. She had

wondered why Mrs. Lawton could be so friendly with people, the mere sight of whom made her bristle with antipathy. But slowly, with years of silent pondering and suffering, the dreadful truth had been made clear. They knew Mrs. Lawton was white: she knew it: and she could afford from her height to stoop to the lowly friends who looked up to her in admiration, and who would never dream of themselves crossing the line which her condescension might overstep. But if they had not understood that she was white! If they had treated her as an equal; if their women had dared to caress her, or their men to look admiration — Viry set her teeth with a quick intaking of her breath. Oh, she loathed them, she loathed them! And this grand lady, with her beauty, her gentle ways, her easy willingness not to assert her superiority, her apparent indifference to her praises in all men's mouths — she hated her, too. It was easy enough for her to visit the depths occasionally, in the most beautiful and becoming raiment, and to dispense here and there a drop of her surfeit of ease and comfort, that all that dark underworld might chant her praises and adore! It was easy enough, apparently, from her rose-crowned heights, to calmly thrust another, her fellow in blood and brain, into that black pit of misery, and complacently expect her to be happy there and to give thanks for her pleasant lot. The hypocrisy of it, the sheer brute callousness of

this modern saint! Viry writhed noiselessly upon her bed. Then all her muscles stiffened as she heard Aunt Dilsey's step on the porch and her knock at the door, followed by the turning of the knob. She relaxed herself by an effort of will.

"Come in, Aunt Dilsey!" she called, in a quiet, natural voice.

"Is you in yere, honey?" asked the old woman, stepping inside. "I been lookin' fer you ter come home, en I 'lowed some er dem little varmints mought er had ter be kep' in. Yere's yo' lunch; eve'ybody's done in de house."

"You oughtn't to spoil me so, Aunt Dilsey; I could have gone in the house."

"I ain't got nobody else ter sp'ile," said Aunt Dilsey, with affected indifference; "Dick done got too big, en Bess she's gone. I been sp'ilin' somebody too long ter quit. Set down en eat, chile. How you come on wid dem quarters chillun?"

"Oh, pretty well. They're stupid, but I suppose they'll learn."

"Dey needs raisin'," said Aunt Dilsey, with conviction. "Dey needs hit a heap wuss dan dey needs goin' ter school. Ef Miss Marg'ret could des see hit daterway, I could go down dar eve'y mawnin' wid er swi'ch en set dem chillun en dey mammies ter washin' deyse'f en cleanin' up dey house en min'in' dey manners ter de w'ite folks, en hit 'ud do a heap mo' good

dan dish yere lit'le school w'at you's gwine ter keep."

"But, Aunt Dilsey, you didn't mind my being educated."

"I dunno whe'er I minds hit or not; I ain't foun' out yit. Hit don' 'pear ter hurt Eb'neezer, ner Jane," she added grudgingly; "but den dey wuz brought up by de w'ite folks. I dunno w'at hit gwine do ter Eb'neezer's chillun; June look mighty biggety ter me las' time I see 'im. I don't want you takin' up wid June, Elviry. He wuz hangin' 'roun' yere mightily, 'peared ter me."

Viry's eyes flashed.

"He won't hang any more," she said briefly.

"Well," began Aunt Dilsey — "W'at you want, Marse Bruce?" she broke off, rising and opening the door as she saw Bruce at the porch outside.

"I sent one of the hands home with fever just now, Aunt Dilsey, and I had to come to the house for something, so I stopped by to tell you. He's down in the last of that new row of cabins — Jake Mason. Send him some soup or milk or something for supper, and look after him till he gets well. I telephoned for Tyree; he'll keep you posted about what he ought to eat. How did the school go, Viry?"

"As well as I expected," she answered indifferently.

"It'll never go any better than you expect," said Bruce, with some sharpness; "you can bank

on that, so just make up your mind to have it a success. Aunt Margaret has set her heart on it — and Miss Bess, too," he added, as Viry's face showed no response to his words. "By the way, here's a letter from Aunt Margaret for you, Aunt Dilsey, and one for Viry from Miss Bess." He smiled involuntarily at the transformation in Viry's face, as she sprang to her feet and reached out her hand, answering his smile with a flashing radiance. He gave her the letters and went out through the side gate to the mines.

A couple of hours later the tall form of Johnson Tyree, the negro doctor, mounted the steps of the cabin. Aunt Dilsey had gone to the house to superintend the preparations for dinner, so he left his directions for the sick man's diet with Viry. He had been born and brought up on a neighboring plantation, and had known the Lawton people, white and black, as a boy; but at fifteen he left home to seek an education in Nashville. He was over thirty now, and had lived in the village for several years, practising medicine. Bruce had known him as a boy, and finding him modest and capable as a man had been glad to give him the practice among the negroes at the Lawton mines; but though he had been coming and going there almost since their opening, he had seen Viry only from afar and at the rarest intervals during her summer vacations. When Margaret was at home he always made his reports to her at the house.

As the fall wore to winter Viry met him more and more. Aunt Dilsey's rheumatism and other "miseries" increased upon her rapidly with the cold weather, and Viry saw that she was breaking fast. She clung tenaciously to the oversight of the pantry and kitchen, which she felt to be the most important part of the trust which her mistress had committed to her, but other things she gave into Viry's hands. Viry took charge of the sick, attended to the preparation of their food under the doctor's orders, and made reports to Bruce when he passed the cabin porch in the evening. She looked after the flowers in the greenhouse and took charge of the house itself, which she kept supplied, as Margaret had done, with blossoms and flowering plants. As the winter passed she grew more contented, or at least less miserable, in her work. The children had learned to keep their distance and to obey, and she never missed the absent smiles. Looking after the sick merely involved, as with Margaret, the seeing that their wants were supplied by others, and she had no objection to going in and out of the cabins in the rôle of an unapproachable benefactress. It was only when some familiarity such as would not have been offered to Mrs. Lawton suggested to her the negroes' consciousness of her oneness with them that her disgust or wrath flamed out, and left them sullen and scowling, but cowed. With the doctor she had no trouble. He was a silent

fellow, intent upon his work, and seemed to notice her only as his work demanded. Viry felt that his manner to her was much as it would have been to Mrs. Lawton, and clothed him with the distinction of being the one negro who had sense enough to understand the gulf which lay between them.

Companionship she had none. She would not go near the negro churches, and while she would have been admitted to the gallery of any of the white churches, she would not go as an inferior. To the negro servants about the place she spoke only when necessary; and the unmarried men at the quarters who ventured upon the familiarity of a call never repeated the experiment. Aunt Dilsey watched her, puzzled and troubled, as she had been for years; but the more she saw of the doctor the more satisfied she became that this was what "de chile" had been waiting for — some one as well educated as herself, as successful and "up-stan'in'," as she expressed it. The old woman knew that her days were numbered, and longed to see the girl married and settled before she died. She regarded the doctor as an answer to prayer, and took great comfort in him, though she knew better than to hint her hopes to Viry. Indeed, Tyree showed no symptoms of the malady to which she felt him foreordained to succumb; but that did not disturb her.

"He better go slow wid Viry ef 'e wan' ter

ketch 'er," she thought. "De Lawd know hit's gwine ter be a wuss job dan sprinklin' salt on a bird's tail. But de man ain't blin', ner 'e ain't no fool; he bleeged ter want 'er, en ef 'e have good sense, en de Lawd answer pra'r — w'ich I know he do — he gwine git 'er atter 'while." So she went her way in peace, never dreaming that Viry was learning to listen for another step and to tremble with joy in another presence.

To Viry it was as natural as the sunlight, as it had been as slow and imperceptible as the dawn. Dick she never saw, except at a distance. When he was not in Bruce's office he was in his own den in the house which Viry never entered, even with flowers, since the day after Margaret's departure, when he had told her in his gentle, impersonal manner, not to disturb the blossoms she had come to replace, and had added kindly that he wanted no flowers in his room which were not of his mother's arranging. But with Bruce it was quite different. Bruce overlooked everything — the school, the gardens, the sick in the quarters. Viry, as Aunt Dilsey's representative, reported one thing or another to him every day, or received his brief directions as he passed and repassed the cabin on his way to and from his work. He would stop only for the moment, hurried and preoccupied; but he was the only one of all her dear child-world to whom she could ever speak. Sometimes he paused long enough to give her

a word of Bess, or to hand her a letter for Aunt Dilsey or herself. She prompted Aunt Dilsey to ask him for such parts of his own or Dick's letters as they might be allowed to see, and he gave them to the old woman generously. Viry read them aloud to her and devoured them in secret afterward for herself, handing them back to him, when he stopped at the porch, with a brief word of thanks.

Bruce was desperately lonely and heart-sick that winter, and his contact with Viry, casual as it was, impressed him anew with her devotion to Bess, and gave him a more tolerant feeling for her than he had ever known. Even her eyes were almost endurable when they shone with such love for Bess; it was a comfort, though of a poor and shadowy kind, to see any lips smile and cheeks flush at the name of the woman whom he loved with the whole force of his strong and stubborn nature. He did not dare to talk of her much to Dick, lest he should betray himself; but Viry was so utterly out of his world that he had no thought, in his brief speech with her, of betraying himself to her; and it did give him some vague comfort to know that even so lowly a heart as hers felt something of his own desperate longing and loyalty. His manner to her grew more kindly as the months went by; occasionally he paused for a moment longer than necessary at the door; and once or twice when, returning to the house at unexpected hours, he

found her busy in the dear old rooms, every corner of which was filled for him with the fragrance of Bess's presence, he had stopped to chat with her for a few moments about some of the memories which every object in the house called up.

Viry had never for a moment been deceived as to his attitude toward her. She had been keenly conscious of his old antagonism, and had resented it with all her heart. It had only been during this last winter that her own dislike of him had melted away in the sunshine of his kindness about Bess. She knew that his only attraction to her — in fact, his only consciousness of her as a person rather than as part of the machinery of the place — was her love for the woman to whom he had given his heart. For a long time she was quite unconscious that the eagerness with which she listened for his coming was anything more than eagerness for news of the girl she loved so much; and when she gradually awoke to the fact that beyond the message she longed for the coming of the messenger, she was not at first greatly disquieted. A man's love may make him restless, but a woman can be long content with mere giving. Viry's love was humble and unexpectant enough; so that for a while she was quite happy, in love with love itself.

XI

Bruce, meanwhile, was having his own difficulties, both within and without. He had never wavered in his determination not to speak to Bess of his love for her until he should have made himself independent of her fortune; but the longer he thought of her the more impossible seemed any scheme of life which did not include her constant presence. Both his fears and his resolutions were quickened by the arrival in the phosphate field, just before Christmas, of one Walter Hayne, who came from New York as the representative of a Northern company which had bought a large tract of land near Fulton and proposed to begin mining at once. Hayne was himself a large shareholder in the company, and would remain at the mines as manager. He was something over thirty years of age, travelled, well-read, fond of music and art, and a man of very considerable wealth. All these facts Bruce gathered from Dick, together with the further information that he and Bess had met Hayne during the Christmas holidays of the year when they were North together and were visiting in New York with their mother. Dick added that he and Bess had been excellent friends ever since;

and Bruce divined that at least some of the many boxes of flowers which she had received while at home could be set down to Mr. Hayne's credit. He himself had seen so little of Bess in the last two years, and she had said so little before him in regard to her own affairs, that he was quite in the dark as to the real significance, or lack of significance, in the coming of this city-bred man to bury himself in an unfamiliar country, amid presumably uncongenial surroundings. The desire for money could scarcely explain it, for he had already more than enough to live in any way he might choose; and Bruce satisfied himself that he could have come for no reason but that it was Bess Lawton's home. He took a careful inventory of Mr. Hayne's attractions, and groaned in secret over the list. The fellow was undeniably good-looking, after his well-dressed, citified fashion; he was evidently a gentleman, intelligent, well-informed, and rich enough to meet Bess on her own level.

Bruce counted his own savings carefully. He had already decided to seek his fortune in some new mining country, the newer the better. He hoped either to discover a mine for himself or to find some man who had discovered one, but who lacked money to develop it, and who would be glad to take him into partnership. To this end he had saved, even to pinching; he had also contrived to make some money outside of his salary, and in another year he would be ready to start.

He knew there were places where a few thousand dollars were all that stood between poverty and fortune. Some such place he meant to find; and when his contract with Mrs. Lawton, which held him until the January which would follow her return, should expire, he would be ready for the venture. He would rather have waited another year, but he dared not waste any time. With Bess's return in the fall suitors would certainly gather about her, and every day would be fraught with danger. He said nothing to Dick of his intention, but went on with his work, trying to reduce every detail to such perfect system that his absence would be felt as little as possible.

For nearly two years now he had had growing trouble with the county authorities. In the great influx of men of both races and of all characters which had followed the discovery of phosphate in the county there had been a due proportion of unscrupulous whites, men without the money for honest investment or the will for honest work, who watched their chance to prey on the community. The old inhabitants had become too absorbed in developing their newly discovered wealth to pay much attention to the local government, which had always wagged on in a perfectly sober and respectable fashion, without particular attention from anybody. When the last local elections had taken place the natives of Jeness County, including the former

office-holders, were indifferent to the whole question; and it was not difficult for a knot of the newcomers to carry out their well-prepared plans and to secure the vacant offices by means of fair speech, pleasant manners, and liberal donations of whiskey to the thousands of negro voters in the camps.

The election had taken place in November, two years ago, and trouble had begun at once. The negroes were paid off on alternate Saturdays, and a large proportion of them spent their time until Monday morning in "shooting craps" so long as their money lasted, and in looking on at the play of their more fortunate neighbors when their own part in the performance had been brought to a halt. On the alternate moneyless Sundays they went to church, where they heard sound doctrine and good advice from both the Baptist and Methodist colored pastors, and where they threw back their heads and sang lustily: —

> "I tells you once, I tells you twice,
> Dey's niggers in hell fer shootin' dice!"

But the next pay-night they were sure to risk both their hard-earned money and their chances of hell in their favorite method of gambling.

The laws against gambling were very strict, as were those against the selling of whiskey, Jeness being a prohibition county. There was no trouble, however, in procuring whiskey in the village, now incorporated as a city under its own

laws; and on Saturday afternoons certain members of each camp were usually detailed to go to town with jugs for the common benefit. Around these central attractions knots of negroes gathered in various cabins, their two weeks' wages in their ragged pockets. The windows would be darkened, the keyhole covered, and the entertainment would begin in profound silence; a passer-by could note nothing amiss. But it is not in negro nature to keep silence long, and they would soon proclaim themselves by shouts, guffaws of laughter, and sometimes by curses, blows, and even by pistol-shots. At such times it was a simple matter for the new sheriff and his aides, making the rounds of the various camps, to discover the groups of law-breakers and make a raid on them. If caught before any of the winners had time to conceal their gains, there was usually enough money in the crowd to satisfy their captors, who would, without any arrest, or the barest form of trial, pocket the cash available, and go their ways, leaving the negroes to face as best they could the two penniless weeks to come. If for any reason the haul proved unprofitable, the negroes were carried to jail, and notice served on the companies for which they worked that they were held for the payment of the legal fine. This would be advanced by the company and deducted from the men's wages next pay-day.

Bruce had paid fines for his men a number of times without giving it any more attention than

was involved in administering a sharp reproof to the culprits; and it was from Tyree that he learned of what the sheriff considered the successful raids, of which he had before been in ignorance. He was thoroughly angry, and warned the officers that if they dared to repeat the offence, he would prosecute them to the full extent of the law. They met this by a counter-threat to the next gang of men raided at the Lawton mines to double their fines next time, if Carleton heard of the raid. The summer was well advanced before Bruce found them out, and he then proceeded to secure their legal conviction. He secured his witnesses and entered suit against the sheriff and the two constables against whom his men were prepared to testify, and thought the matter practically settled; but the cases were postponed on some flimsy pretext at the next term of the court, and continued to be postponed, on one pretext or another, for the following twelve months, while his witnesses disappeared, leaving his employ one after another, sometimes with no notice of their flitting, sometimes with the brief statement that they had been offered better wages "som'ers else."

Seeing how matters were going, Bruce turned his attention to the election now again approaching. The first person to whom he spoke was his uncle.

"Bruce, you're a fool," said that gentleman, brusquely. "Do you suppose decent people can

do anything when there's this horde of black voters to deal with? Deal with, indeed! I don't intend to have anything to do with them myself, even to fight them. If they'll keep their distance, I'll keep mine."

"But, uncle, these are white men."

"Niggers elected 'em, sir; and they'd elect the devil himself if he'd give a drink of whiskey for their votes. I know that sheriff, Martin," the old man went on, crimson waves mounting slowly on his bald old head; "he was born down in Alabama. His daddy was a carpet-bagger, and his grandfather was an overseer — at least he ought to have been if he wasn't. I just told Martin if he didn't let my hands alone I'd fill him so full of holes he'd take himself for a cullender, and he's kept off my place since. He doesn't bother me. I had some dealings with his father once in Alabama, and he knows I'll do what I say."

"Well, he bothers other people, uncle, and he's fleecing the negroes outrageously."

"What did the fools expect when they voted for him?" snarled the old man. "Here, boy, I'm busy. If you have any business, say so; but I've got no time to waste talking nigger politics."

Bruce went home and opened his mind to Dick, expecting, it must be confessed, very little interest on his part; but he reckoned without his host; Dick took it up at once with enthusiasm.

"We must get some decent fellow to run for sheriff," he said; "and then we'll get Uncle Eb and the negro preachers and Tyree to help us, and we'll start in on these darkies for a campaign of education. It's over six weeks till the election; I think we can turn Martin out."

The former sheriff, Peters, finally consented to run again, and Ebeneezer and the other negroes of his class gladly agreed to do their best to secure his election. Meetings were held at all the camps, speeches were made, and, apparently, great enthusiasm aroused. A few of the mine-owners joined in the movement; but for the most part they agreed in a more or less outspoken manner with old Mr. Bruce. The Martin crowd gave no sign except that the raids on the camps ceased, and no fines, legal or otherwise, were imposed. The crap-players enjoyed their day of prosperity to the full, and much of the money which formerly found its way directly to the sheriff's pocket now reached it by the more circuitous route of the till in the saloon of his friend and colleague, Hiram Bolles, in which he had a large financial interest.

The day before the election Bruce called the hands together and told them that such of them as wished to vote for Peters could assemble at the office at six in the morning, when wagons would be in waiting to take them to the polls, whither he and Mr. Lawton would accompany them to see that they were not

molested in casting their votes. Promptly at the hour appointed both the young men were on hand, and by their orders a long array of wagons was drawn up in the road before the porch. Half a dozen negroes were lounging about.

"What makes the men so slow?" asked Bruce, impatiently, after waiting for ten minutes, during which time two or three men had straggled in. "Go down to the quarters, Joe, and tell them to hurry."

"Yassir," said Joe, pulling at his cap and grinning uneasily.

He was gone for some time, and finally returned with two more men shambling at his heels.

"Where are they?" demanded Bruce. "Why didn't you tell them to come?"

Joe looked at the horizon, scratching his head in embarrassment.

"Dey done gone ter town, boss," he said; "dey warn't dar."

Bruce looked at him incredulously.

"Two hundred of them were pledged to come," he said. "Do you mean to say they've gone to vote for Martin?"

Joe shuffled uneasily.

"I dunno who dey gwine vote fer, cap'n," he replied; "but de sheriff sont some sort o' word out yere las' night ter some on 'em, en dey des say dey gwine ter town."

There was no more to be got out of Joe, or

any of the others, and Bruce and Dick mounted their horses and rode to town in the early morning with their eleven voters, the objects, as they returned, of a deal of good-natured chaffing from the friends whom they met on the way.

When the polls were closed and the votes counted, Martin was returned by an overwhelming majority, which included the almost solid negro vote. It was a cheap victory for the sheriff. The money he had paid for votes was speedily returned to him in the guise of fines for crap-playing, for the raids recommenced at once. The only dead loss, as he himself said, was the whiskey, which had been appropriated beyond recall.

Bruce was utterly disgusted.

"Uncle was right," he said to Dick; "I was a fool to meddle with the thing at all, or to expect to teach darkies sense. I can't get at the scoundrel through the courts, either. I'll adopt uncle's policy and warn Martin off the premises; and the next time I meddle with 'nigger' votes I'll do it to some purpose."

"That's where you're wrong, Bruce," said Dick. "For my part, I'm into the fight for the rest of my life, or till I whip. It's the principle of the thing, man. You can't give up what's right just because you've been beaten once, or a thousand times. I'll fight for it till I die."

"Well, you'll never win, old man; at least, not as long as the darkies themselves care less for

justice than they do for half a dollar or a drink. Before you can do anything you've got to take the ballot away from nine-tenths of them."

"If they were all like Uncle Eb or Tyree —"

"But you see they're not; they're a set of children, unable to look beyond their noses. The only chance is to treat them as children and make them mind. I'll warn Martin off for the present, and next time I'll take a hand in the election after a more paternal fashion."

"You're wrong, Bruce; it's better to fight square, even if you lose. I'm in for it, myself."

Bruce looked at him with affectionate amusement in his eyes.

"A fellow never knows where to have you idealists, Dick. Aunt Margaret told me she didn't want to open these mines, and thought, as a matter of course, you'd agree with her; she was afraid Bess might object: and Bess didn't care twopence about it, while nothing would do you but to rip the whole thing wide open and pitch into business for all you were worth; and a fine business man you're making, too. And now you must go into politics — local county politics, bless you, in a county full of numskull darkies! Where will ideals land you next?" He looked at Dick with the indulgent smile of superior age, half whimsical, half bantering.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Dick, ruefully; "do you take me for a prophet? Of course I don't say I can do much, especially if a

clear-headed fellow like you goes back on me. But after all, it isn't what one does that counts. That's the world's way of counting, I know; but a man's real measure is the thing he works for, not the thing he does."

"'— All the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,'

eh?" said Bruce, rising and stretching himself. "'Success is naught, endeavor's all,' I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, it's true; of course it's true. But if it were not for a few people like you and Aunt Margaret, the rest of us would surely forget it. The Lord knows what would have become of me without you — what would become of me yet."

"Bess sees it as well as I do, and better," said Dick, half resentfully. Bruce bent to stir the fire, smiling into it at the thought of any one, even Dick, defending Bess to him.

"It's bedtime for me," he said, turning. "A bloated aristocrat like you, who doesn't need to begin work until after breakfast, can afford to sit up late and talk politics; but a horny-handed son of toil, who must be at the mines on the stroke of six, must be off."

"I wish you'd quit that, Bruce. What is the use of your getting up with the men? The foremen are out there. There isn't a man in the county who holds your position who does it."

"No. And there isn't a man in the county who gets the work out of his men that I do, or who mines so much rock, or does it so cheaply, or pays such wages," said Bruce. "I don't mean it for boasting, old man, but the only way to manage it is for me to be on hand all the time; if I take to sleeping late in the mornings, you'll see a slump in the work."

"I know that, but I don't care. The rock will stay there till we get it out."

"I daresay. But you see I have an ideal or two of my own; and one of them is to do good work for good pay — the best work I'm capable of. I wouldn't serve your mother any other way. Good night."

He was already at the door, but turned back suddenly.

"By the way, Dick, do you remember that fellow Simmons your mother discovered last summer and asked me to find work for?"

"That white tramp who turned out to be possessed of a wagon-load of motherless children?"

"Yes. I gave him a job hauling wood for the kilns, and afterward I made him foreman of a gang. The fellow's as sharp as a tack, and a capital workman when he lets whiskey alone."

"Has he been drinking? Mother thought he hadn't formed the habit, I remember, and that he'd be all right."

"He hasn't been drunk, but he drinks on the

sly. That's none of my business, if he does his work. But I found out to-day he's been cheating systematically ever since I made him a foreman. He gives the negroes the wrong tally for their work, and robs them, and he overtallies on my sheet and robs at that end of the line, too. I might not have caught up with him if he'd been content with fleecing the men — they'd never suspect; but I've known for a good while there was a leak somewhere, for the rock shipped didn't tally with the rock mined. I spotted him to-day. He ought to be put in the penitentiary, of course: it would be the best thing for those children, too; but you know Aunt Margaret won't see it that way. It won't do for me to tell her when she comes home that I've landed the man she left in my charge in jail."

"No," said Dick; "she'll be dreadfully distressed, and think he would have been all right if he'd just been forgiven and tried again. That's the only spot of unreason in my mother — for she does carry it to the point of unreason — and it's one of the finest things about her, too. I've often thought about it, for it isn't her nature, exactly; I think she must have been like Bess when she was young, and inclined to be a little hard on sinners. Somebody she dearly loved must have needed a great forgiveness once, and mother never can bear to see anybody punished any more."

"Why, Dick Lawton!" exclaimed Bruce, "where on earth did you scare up such a no-

tion as that? No one who ever knew your mother would wrong her."

"I don't know who it was, nor when, but it happened; it's the only way I can explain her. But anyway, she made up her mind that if Simmons were properly borne with he could be made a man of. I doubted it, myself, the first time I ever set eyes on him; but mother's insight is so much finer than mine I may be wrong. Anyway, he'll have to be given a chance. What will you do?"

"Oh, I've done it. I gave him a good raking. I told him what I thought of a man who would cheat a darky, and I told him the penitentiary was where he belonged. But I told him Aunt Margaret believed in him, and that for her sake I'd try him again, and that it wasn't too late for him to take a fresh start if he wanted to. I gave him his old job of hauling wood at a dollar a day; but of course that's not enough for all those children. Aunt Dilsey must look after them. I told him to stay in the same house, and there'd be no house-rent for the present. You send Aunt Dilsey, so if he questions her he won't connect her coming with me. He's mad enough, and mean enough, to let the children suffer to spite me if he thought I was trying to help them; he'd see to it that he didn't suffer himself, the sneak! He'd like to murder me, I fancy."

"Bruce," said Dick, quickly, "there's a deal of

lawlessness around here, and it grows worse instead of better. Do you always go armed?"

"Of course. Not that I expect to need to shoot, but it has a good effect. A man can't manage a gang like these phosphate negroes without being ready for any emergency; but if they know he's ready, the emergency's not likely to turn up."

"I don't like your trouble with Simmons," said Dick; "he's mean enough for anything."

"Nonsense, the man's a coward," said Bruce, lightly; "and they're all afraid of me, white and black. I had an experience with Jim Porter last summer that's given me a great reputation as a dead shot. Jim is the brightest darky in the mines, but he was beginning to drink. I told him if he'd quit whiskey I'd make him a foreman, but he had to promise never to go off the place at night; as sure as he did it he'd go to town, and as sure as he went to town he'd drink. He agreed, and we made the contract on that basis. He was as steady as a court-house, but I think some of the men got to chaffing him. He came down to my office one night when I was at work down there, his lantern lighted all ready for the trip, and told me he was going to town to buy him some shoes.

"'To-morrow's Saturday, and a half-holiday,' I said; 'you can go to-morrow afternoon.'

"'I'm ergwine ter-night,' he said; 'I ain't er baby; I'm er man.'

"'All right,' I said; 'but you know our contract. Pack up your traps when you come back, and be off the place by half-past six in the morning, or I'll have you arrested for trespass.'

"'I'll git off in time,' he said, and started off across the fields, swinging his lantern. I hated to lose the fellow, and concluded I'd stop him if I could. So I took my rifle out of the office and waited until he was about to vanish in a hollow, and then shot his light out for him." He broke into a laugh.

"What did he do?" asked Dick.

"He scared me for half a second," said Bruce. "I didn't see how a fellow could yell so unless he were mortally wounded at the very least. He came loping back, yelping at every jump.

"'Fer de Lawd's sake, cap'n, don' shoot no mo',' he gasped out. 'I ain't gwine ter town.'

"'Then go to bed, you fool,' I said, 'and be ready for your work in the morning.' And he was. I don't know what sort of tale he told in the quarters; but they all think I can split a hair that's flying from a church steeple. Things have moved like they were greased ever since. I don't need to look at a pistol, and won't as long as they know I've got one. But I'm worse than Aunt Hattie Bruce when she's telling her best friend good-by at the door. Good night, old man; I'm gone this time;" and he closed the door behind him and ran upstairs.

XII

"Dick," said Bruce one morning at breakfast, "we must find some way to put a stop to the drinking and rioting of our men during Christmas week. I won't stand again what I stood last year and what every manager of a mine in the county stands as long as 'de Crismus' lasts. I've made up my mind that in this camp 'de Crismus' is a doomed institution."

"It's outrageous, I know, and grows constantly worse, with the class of negroes we have here; last year's record of four killings in two days will be broken this year, I don't doubt. But how can you possibly break it up?"

"I mean to try for it, anyway. If we can only break into the old notion that Christmas lasts eight days instead of one, and get the men back to work on the morning of the twenty-sixth, there'll be no trouble; and if they can be kept sober Christmas day, we can do it."

"If," said Dick; "but how?"

"I want to give them a barbecue under one of the big sheds. They'd rather have it than anything in this world, except, perhaps, a watermelon in July. It will take a lot of hogs to fill the crowd full; but if we provide the meat,

they'll eat till they are full, and no power on earth can keep them awake afterwards. They'll sleep clear through till next morning, and then they'll go to work. The rains have thrown me behind with my orders, and now that the weather is good I can't afford to have the whole camp lay off for an eight days' spree."

"That's an idea worth patenting, Bruce; we'll try it, sure as fate."

So word was passed through the quarters of the impending festivities, the men being informed at the same time that those of them who did not wish to go to work on the morning of the twenty-sixth and work all through 'de Crismus' could leave on the Saturday before, which was pay-day. But what darky would quit camp just before a barbecue, even if staying necessitated Christmas work? Some of the men were told off on Saturday afternoon to dig the trench for the barbecuing under one of the long sheds, and as the negroes went to the office for their pay they saw the earth already being thrown out from the long line marked off for the trench. They ogled it as they passed by, their tongues seeking the corners of their lips in luscious anticipation. They would all stay, and work on the twenty-sixth.

On Monday the trench was finished, the iron bars laid across it and fastened into the ground on either side, and that night the men in their cabins watched the great fires built up to furnish

the bed of coals for the trench. At daylight they all, no matter in what quarter their work lay, managed to stroll by the shed on their way to it; and all down the trench the bed of coals glowed fiercely under the long line of carcasses already roasting. There were a few sheep for those whose perverted taste did not prefer pork, but all the rest were hogs, fat and juicy, and already beginning to scent the air with a promise of delicious odors to come. Up and down the line walked the two cooks — Buck Peters, ex-slave of the ex-sheriff, and the first authority in the county on barbecued meat, and Joe Walters, his assistant, one of the hands. They wore white caps, but no aprons as yet, and felt their importance mightily. Each carried a bucket of spiced vinegar, and a long stick wrapped thickly at one end with new linen, with which, as they walked back and forth, they basted the roasting meat. Every now and then, when quite sure that some admiring eye was fixed upon him, Buck would walk solemnly up to Joe, issue some low-voiced command, inspect the contents of his bucket, and occasionally replenish it from the supplies on a table near at hand. A dozen small boys from the quarters stood to heap fresh logs on the fires just outside the shed, leaping forward at a nod from Buck with an alacrity never displayed at home for similar toil, and straining their small bodies over the big logs in frantic rivalry for the great man's favor.

Putting fresh coals under the meat was a serious and delicate operation which Buck entrusted to no other hands. Joe, trembling under his chief's frown, brought the coals by the shovelful and dropped them into the trench between the carcasses, whereupon Buck himself, with an air of mighty import, thrust a long poker through the bars and spread the fire until its heat was given out in every spot to his perfect satisfaction. This done, he would rise solemnly, receive his bucket from the hands of a worshipping satellite, and resume his stately march.

That night he and Joe basted and slept by turns, a shake-down under the shed receiving first one and then the other through the long night watches; and by noon of the next day the barbecued meat was a feast fit for a king. Brown and crisp without, tender and juicy to the bone, it filled the air with perfumed incense, while many a longing stomach quaked because of it, and many a hungry mouth watered, as the quarters emptied themselves and the black folk, men, women, and children, gathered for the feast.

Boards laid on trestles made long tables down two of the near-by sheds, and were laden with great piles of bread and gallons of steaming coffee. Joe helped to serve the meat faithfully, but reserved as his own portion one of the heads which, split and cooked to a turn, were regarded by all as the chief dainty of the feast. As he carved ample portions of the meat and gave

them to the waiting boys to carry to the tables, the head lay on the board beside him, and he licked his lips as often as he looked at it. His attention, however, was perforce divided between it and his duties as carver, so that he did not see a little brown paw reach stealthily from behind him and grasp his treasure; he only knew that when he looked again it was gone.

"Whar dat head?" he gasped. "Whar dat head?" he repeated, in growing consternation and louder tones, looking wildly about him to discover the cause of his bereavement. The others, secure in their own enjoyment, paid little attention to him; but presently he caught sight of a small brown figure running across the dumps and silhouetted against the gray sky. Its two hands held something in which its face was buried even as its slim legs carried it farther afield. With a mingled yell of rage and triumph Joe sprang from the shed and gave chase, while the crowd looked on and laughed. The boy ran as fast as he could, but it was hard to run and eat too; so presently, secure in the blissful consciousness that nothing short of an emetic could rob him of the bulk of his prey, he tore off as much meat as his hands could hold, flung the head in his enemy's path, and dashed on. Joe looked vindictively after him, but he stopped; half a loaf was better than no bread. Picking up the remnant of his feast he walked slowly back to make the most of what remained to him,

and to meet, as best he could, the laughter of his friends. Meat remained in abundance, but there were no more heads.

The piles of bread dwindled, the coffee sank lower in the great buckets; even the meat disappeared, and nothing remained on the long tables but bones, crumbs, and empty tin cups. The laughter died down as one group after another disengaged itself from the mass and walked slowly off to the quarters to stretch out before the big log fires, smoke, dip snuff, and ruminate. A raw drizzle of rain set in outside, but within were warmth and content; and as the early winter night drew its dark folds about the hills, the feast and the warmth fulfilled Bruce's expectations, and sleep reigned in the quarters.

Hayne, then newly arrived, had come over at Dick's invitation to see a Southern barbecue and to take his Christmas dinner at the Lawton house. He was much impressed.

"I'll try this at my place next Christmas," he said; "I've only a few hands engaged yet, but they're all drunk already, and my foreman tells me they'll be no manner of account for a week. I want to discharge them all, but he insists I can't better myself if I do."

"Men that are straight as a string all the rest of the year will go to the devil Christmas week," said Bruce, as they walked toward the house. "You'll have to put up with it unless you can find some way to prevent it; you can't run

things as you would with Northern workmen. But you'll soon see your way to manage them, of course."

They went into Margaret's sitting room, where at Dick's request Hayne, to Bruce's disgust, seated himself at Bess's piano and gave them some very good music, chatting easily at intervals on many subjects. The air of the house charmed him. It was just what he had expected Elizabeth Lawton's home to be, only more homelike, more subtly expressive of the individuality of the women who made it; just as Bess herself, no matter what he thought of her in her absence, proved always more beautiful, more charming, than his best thoughts of her. He talked well, but to himself his words seemed all at random, so filled was he with a sense of the girl's gracious and joyous presence. He would gladly have excused both the young men from all the demands of hospitality if they would only have left him alone in that room till dinner time.

Aunt Dilsey, meanwhile, was seated in the kitchen as a queen upon her throne, while her subjects trembled before her or sped to do her bidding. Never before had the responsibility for Christmas entertainment of strangers rested upon her shoulders alone, and the honor of the house must be maintained. During the meal she sat in the butler's pantry, inspecting every dish as it passed with hawklike eye, peering anxiously

through the crack of the door at the stranger's back, which she had carefully arranged should be turned in that direction, and listening for any scrap of conversation which might reveal his impressions of Southern housekeeping.

"I dunno huccome Marse Dick ter be askin' dat ar Yankee man ter we-all's house fer Crismus dinner," she grumbled afterward to Viry. "I yeered 'im talkin' 'bout Miss Marg'ret en Bess like 'e wuz han' en glove wid 'em. Fus' news you know w'en dey comes back 'e gwine be expectin' ter be asked out yere ter dinner wid dat chile en makin' eyes at 'er! He mout des ez well go 'long; she ain't gwine look at 'im!"

"They're real good friends, Aunt Dilsey," said Viry. "Don't you remember what beautiful flowers he sent her last summer?"

Aunt Dilsey squared herself, her hands on her hips.

"Dat Yankee sendin' flowers ter ole Miss' gran'chile?" she demanded indignantly. "Hit's enuff fer ter make ole Marse Dick Davison tu'n in he grave — en ole Miss, too. On'y ef ole Miss knowed enuff erbout hit fer ter tu'n, she'd git up en put a stop ter hit, sho's you're born. Hit's des come er sendin' de chile up Norf ter school. We all done had enuff er Yankees endurin' er de war."

"Why, Aunt Dilsey, they're the same as other folks now they've quit fighting."

Aunt Dilsey sniffed.

"Dey ain't never quit deir meanness ez I've yearn tell of," she declared scornfully. "Can' nobody tell me nothin' 'bout de Yankees. Dey come yere endurin' er de war en stole mighty nigh eve'ything we-all had ter eat, en sassed ole Miss 'erse'f twell she up er run 'em outen de house. My land, she wuz mad dat day! En silver! Me en Thomas Jeff'son had ter run out in de night-time, two-th'ee times en bury hit, kaze de Yankees wuz comin.' I gwine count de spoons w'en dis un's gone. I don' trus' none un 'em."

Viry laughed.

"You'll like him better if Miss Bess marries him," she said.

"You hole yo' tongue, Elviry Sampson!" exclaimed Aunt Dilsey, wrathfully; "hit ain't fitten ter talk erbout. De chile gwine marry Marse Bruce Carleton soon ez she git ole enuff."

"How do you know?" asked Viry, eagerly. "Are they engaged? Do you think Miss Bess cares for him?"

"Hit ain't none er yo' business whe'er she do er whe'er she don't," replied Aunt Dilsey, loftily; "dat's w'ite folks' doin's. But I know she gwine marry 'im, en Miss Marg'ret know hit, too. Dish yere Yankee man mout des 's well go 'long back whar 'e come f'um."

"I wonder if he knows it," said Viry, thoughtfully.

"He don' know nothin'," retorted Aunt Dil-

sey. "He des green. I yeered 'im talkin' in dar ter our folks, braggin' 'bout de ole hysterercal places w'at dey has up Norf like dey wuzn't nary nother thing like 'em now'eres else. Ole hysterercal places! I like ter know if dey got ennything mo' hysterercaller dan dish yere ole Davison place what Miss Marg'ret's gran'pa done make outen de wilderness w'en he en his slaves come out f'um Firginny! En Bunker Hill! I lay hit ain't ha'f ez big ez ary one er dese yere hills er Miss Marg'ret's w'at she's des diggin' up en th'owin' erway ter git de phosphate outen 'em! Des lis'en at 'im playin' dat pianner ergin! I clar ter grashus I des plumb wo' out wid 'im. I'm gwine ter bed."

Viry helped her to undress, and then sat long by the dying fire, listening to the slow drip of the drizzling rain on the roof, and puzzling over what Aunt Dilsey had said about Bess's marrying Bruce. She was sure Mrs. Lawton had not spoken to the old woman, but Aunt Dilsey often divined things which were in her thoughts. Bruce himself could scarcely share Aunt Dilsey's certainty; if he did, he would be different — happier, and less stern. But even if Mr. Hayne were in love with Bess, it seemed scarcely possible to Viry that she should prefer him, or any one else, to Bruce. Then suddenly her thoughts turned away from Bess and in upon her own life, solitary, silent, forever separate from love. The old bitterness welled up afresh, and with it a grow-

ing, passionate protest against the proud exclusiveness of the race to which she felt that she belonged, and which yet, without pity or compunction, shut her into outer darkness with those whom she despised.

The music in the big house ceased, the lights went out; her own fire died to ashes; and in all the world no sound was left but the continual dropping of the rain, slow, persistent, torturing, wearing its way by sure degrees through the stanchest roof, and eating into the solid rock itself.

XIII

One morning early in February Bruce was galloping his horse down the plantation road which led to the pike. At the big gate he met Ebeneezer, leading through it his sleek gray mare.

"Good morning, Uncle Eb," he said, reining in as he passed him; "you're one of the people I'm looking for this morning. That long wet spell in January has thrown me behind again, and I want forty or fifty extra hands. Can't you beat around the country and get me some? Run up to Nashville if necessary. I wish the weather could be evened up — a little less wet in winter time and a little more so in August. Tennessee wasn't thinking about phosphate when she settled her weather schedule."

Uncle Eb scratched his head.

"I mebbe could find some hands, Marse Bruce, but I couldn't recommend none on 'em. Steady men have all got a job; an' hit's a cu'ous lot come in sense the camps was opened."

"Oh, well, I can't be particular in a squeeze like this; and I pay by the ton, so if they're trifling, I don't lose anything. Hustle around and get me as many as you can. Try here to-day, and in Fulton, and go to Nashville to-

morrow. I must get the rock out, somehow. We haven't had three days' sunshine together since the middle of December."

"No, suh, we ain't; but I spec we'll have a drought next summer."

"I'd rather have one now," answered Bruce, moving off down the pike, while Ebeneezer turned slowly about and prepared to follow him to town.

Half a mile farther on Bruce met the sheriff, and reined in his horse again.

"Well, Martin," he said, "they put off my cases against you again last month; and if they hadn't, you've made away with my witnesses. It looks as if I stand no show to get you into the penitentiary."

"That's so, Mr. Carleton," said the sheriff, genially. He rolled his quid to the other cheek and took accurate aim at a dried elder leaf in the fence corner as a receptacle for his tobacco juice. "What are you going to do about it?" he inquired with an air of friendly, impersonal interest.

"I'm going to let you alone as long as you don't interfere with my men. If you come on our place to break the law, I'll take the law into my own hands and fill you full of buckshot; but if you'll drop your meddling in my camp, I'll drop the cases."

"How about the next election?"

"I'll do what I can against you, of course; but I'm done trying to educate fool negroes.

As long as there are a few white men to help you buy up negro votes I suppose you'll be sheriff of Jeness County."

"That's about the size of it," said the sheriff, composedly. "And Lord, Mr. Carleton, what do you care? I won't bother you any more. Those cases are a worry and expense to me, and I'll be glad to accommodate you about your men; but as for the rest of these niggers, some feller's bound to make a livin' off of 'em — it 'ud just be flying in the face of Providence not to. Why, if somebody didn't get their money, they'd drink it up or gamble it away. I'm real glad you and Mr. Lawton have come to take a more sensible view of matters."

"Oh, I'm not speaking for Dick Lawton. These cases are mine, and I'll drop them; but when it comes to an election, Lawton will fight you every time; and I will myself, only in a different way."

"Oh, well," said the sheriff, easily, "it don't matter. Fine young man, Mr. Lawton. If he thinks he can beat any sense into a nigger's head, and it amuses him to try, he can't hurt anything. Glad to have had this chat with you, Mr. Carleton. Any time I can accommodate you, let me know. Mornin', sir. Get along, Jerry," and he touched up his horse and was gone.

Bruce rode on toward town with something of a kindly feeling for the county boss in spite of himself, and with a new perception of the power of a sharp rascal who adds to his shrewd-

ness such an easy friendliness, even toward his enemies.

"I don't wonder he pulls the wool over the darkies' eyes," he mused; "and poor old Peters, as straight as a string and as sour as last week's buttermilk, couldn't get a dozen votes in our camp! Well, so goes the world."

He rode on, stopping now and then to speak to some negro whom he met trudging along the road, picking up two or three hands before he reached town, and as many on his way home. That evening Ebeneezer came in to report.

"I found twenty-one to-day, Marse Bruce," he said, standing on the back porch, holding his hat between his thumb and forefinger and scratching his head with the unengaged portion of his hand; "I sent 'em all to the office to see you. Did they come?"

"Yes; they all turned up."

"I was sorter sorry I took two of 'em. I told you I didn't know nothin' about 'em. But after I sent these two out here I saw a man that knows 'em, an' he said they're plumb bad men. Cotton, their name is, Ike an' Sam Cotton. He say Ike had the name of killin' a man where he come from, an' Sam ain't no better. He jus' told me about it a little while ago, an' I thought I'd come up an' tell you. Mebbe you better not take them two. I can get plenty o' men in Nashville."

"That will be all right, Uncle Eb. I'm too short of rock to turn anybody off while this

weather holds. I'll try them, anyway; but I'll keep an eye on them, and if they make any trouble, I'll move them out double-quick."

"Well, suh, I reckon you know bes'," said Uncle Eb, doubtfully; "good evenin', Marse Bruce." He replaced his hat and went toward the side gate, stopping on his way at his mother's cabin.

The fine weather held for quite two weeks, and the men worked early and late in the lengthening, springlike days. The Cotton brothers proved good workmen, and Bruce had almost forgotten Ebeneezer's warning, when one morning, at the six o'clock muster, Jim, the foreman of the gang to which they belonged, reported them both absent.

"Tell you de trufe, cap'n," he added, "I don' want dem men in my gang no mo'. Dey tuk er notion dey don' wanter go ter wuk so soon in de mawnin', en dey won' git up. I been wakin' 'em, same ez I does all my men, en yistiddy mawnin' Ike, he say ef I wake him up ergin, he gwine bus' my head wide open. I ain' been down dar sense."

"All right," said Bruce, "you take your men and go on to work." Even as he spoke he was moving toward the quarters, and Jim looked after him open-mouthed.

"Cap'n ain' scared er nothin'," he remarked to his men, "but he don' know dem Cottons; he gwine git hurt."

It spoke well for Bruce's discipline that Jim and his gang moved off at once to their work, which was quite out of sight of the quarters. Bruce walked on toward the Cottons' cabin and thundered on the door.

"You stop that racket en go ter hell!" shouted a voice inside.

"Open this door!" commanded Bruce.

"Oh, hit's you, is hit?" commented Ike. "Well, I ain' gwine ter open nothin'. You kin go ter hell, too."

Bruce looked around and saw an axe lying across a half-cut log behind the next cabin. He caught it up and with two or three blows splintered the door. The two men within glared at him without speaking.

"Come up to the office and get your pay inside of ten minutes," said Bruce, curtly. "I'll give you fifteen minutes to get off the place." He turned on his heel, threw the axe back on the wood-pile, and strode off without turning his head.

He went to the place where Jim's gang was loading trams for the washer and stood there, giving brief directions, when a queer sound in Jim's throat made him look at him in surprise.

"For Gawd's sake, dodge, cap'n!" he gasped, falling flat as he spoke in the deep cut of the diggings where he stood. As if by magic the men disappeared behind the trams, or fell on their faces where they stood. Before Bruce

could turn a bullet whizzed by his cheek, and another cut the top of his hat. His pistol was in his hand, cocked, as he wheeled, but as he pulled the trigger he found it caught. He examined it coolly, found the trouble and remedied it, standing motionless meanwhile, while the two Cottons emptied their rifles, one shot after another. Then he raised his pistol and fired twice. At the first shot Ike's gun fell to the ground, and he sank after it, groaning; at the second, Sam dropped his weapon, turned with a yell, and ran, holding his right arm as he fled. Bruce walked over to the negro, kicking the gun out of his way as he went. The men swarmed out of their hiding-places and looked at "de cap'n" with awe.

"Run down to the nearest cabin, Jim, and get me a piece of sheet or something to tie this fellow up till I can get the doctor. He isn't hurt much; I only shot to disable him."

Jim ran at lightning speed, and Bruce stanched the wound as skilfully as he could.

"Quit your howling," he said sternly, "and get up. Your collar-bone's broken, and you've got a hole in your shoulder that will stop your holding a gun there till I get you into the penitentiary; that's all. Go to the office till I get the doctor; I'll turn you over to the sheriff afterward. No, confound you! Let that gun alone!"

Ike walked slowly to the office, and Bruce

followed him. He telephoned for Dr. Ward and for Martin, to whom, on his arrival, he gave a description of Sam. The doctor pronounced the wound a slight one, and Bruce, turning the man over to the sheriff, went out on his usual rounds, amused by the open-eyed wonder and admiration of the men, who seemed all to have learned of the morning's occurrence by that "wireless telegraphy" so common among negroes and so hard for the white man to explain.

A few days later the sheriff rode out again.

"Well, your nigger's dead, Mr. Carleton," he announced genially; "I congratulate you and the county."

"Dead! What did he die of?"

"Blood-poison," said the sheriff, promptly, "brought on by the hole you made in his shoulder. Doctor says a pin-scratch would 'a' been the death of him just as certain: he was just where you couldn't break his skin without killin' him; you might say he was walkin' around invitin' blood-poison. But I reckon he didn't know it," he chuckled, "or he would 'a' been a leetle more shy o' your gun."

"I'm sorry," said Bruce; "I did the best I could. I suppose," he added, after a moment's thought, "I'd better go to town and give bond. Or shall I wait till after the inquest?"

"Lord, no!" said the sheriff, expectorating freely. "What's the use of an inquest? I planted the nigger before I come out to tell you.

There ain't no call for an inquest; everybody knows how it happened. An' I want you to know, Mr. Carleton, I know a brave man when I see one. You can fight me all you want to, but I'm proud to know you, sir, an' your grit's an honor to the county. Will you shake hands with a blackguard sheriff?"

"I'll shake hands with James Martin," said Bruce, reaching out his hand; "but I'd like this thing brought up and tried. Did you catch Sam?"

"No, I didn't. I believe he hid around here for a day or two, but you know how niggers are; the best of 'em will shield a hound like that from the law; there ain't one in the county wouldn't help him off. He's gone."

"I know several who wouldn't have helped him," said Bruce. "But if he's gone, the folks where he is will have to watch out for him. He'll live to be hung, if somebody doesn't shoot him first."

"Well, I hope somebody'll shoot him," said the sheriff, "at least, if I'd have the hangin' of him." He turned his horse's head. "I saw a man hung when I was a boy once, and it's a job I won't do for any darned nigger; they'll have to get a deputy for that. I think I'll quit bein' sheriff, anyhow, in a year or so, an' go up to the legislature."

"That would offer a fine field for your talents," said Bruce, gravely.

The sheriff bestowed upon him a cordial wink. "Bet your life!" he said blithely. "Lots doin' in a legislature for a feller that keeps his eyes peeled an' has a good solid constituency of black fools behind him. Well, good afternoon, Mr. Carleton; I must be going."

Bruce closed his office door and walked toward the house. At Aunt Dilsey's cabin he stopped and knocked. Viry answered his summons.

"Where's Aunt Dilsey?" he asked. "Is she better?"

"She says she is. She went to the house to see about dinner; that's the one thing she won't trust to me."

"Let her do as she likes. If she ever gives up those keys, she'll think her usefulness is over, and she'll lie down and die."

"She says Dr. Ward came this morning and laughed at her for thinking she was getting old. I was at school and didn't see him. What did he say, Mr. Bruce?"

"He thinks she's pretty feeble. She's seventy-five or eighty years old, you see; she really has kept up wonderfully. But he thinks she's breaking right fast."

"Oughtn't Miss Margaret to know?"

"I'll write her what Ward said, of course. I expect it will shorten her trip. She won't wait until fall to come home if anything's wrong with Aunt Dilsey."

The color leaped into Viry's cheeks.

"Will Miss Bess come?" she asked.

"She'd hardly stay behind," said Bruce, smiling himself at the thought. "But there's no hurry, Ward thinks. You just watch her and take as good care of her as you can;" and he passed on into the house.

Two or three weeks later, as he came through the yard, he passed Viry on her knees at Bess's favorite rose-bed, and stopped a moment to see what she was doing. With a pointed stick she had written the word "Elizabeth" in the dirt along the edge of the bed, and was dropping seed into the tiny trench. He stood looking down at the letters, his thoughts far away, his face softening, and a tender light in his dark eyes. Viry glanced at him covertly as she went on with her seed-sowing, patting the light soil back into place. He was evidently quite unconscious of her, though his presence thrilled her to the finger-tips. Presently his face darkened again and he turned away, lifting his hat to push the hair from his forehead with an impatient hand. Viry heard him sigh as he walked across the grass. She stopped in her half-completed task, her eyes slowly filling with tears. Did Miss Bess really care for him? she wondered. Surely he did not hope it; and if she did not — Viry caught her breath. Once or twice already the thought had stirred within her, and now it lifted its head boldly, unre-

buked. If Miss Bess did not care, if he had no chance with her, why should not Viry teach him to care for her, just a little, for a little while? Not as he cared for Miss Bess, of course, that was impossible; but surely she was pretty enough to please a man's fancy for a week or a month; and why should she not have the poor best which was within her reach — if it were within it? If Miss Bess cared for him, ever so little, she wished no consciousness of herself to darken his mind; but so far as Bruce himself was concerned, she had no compunction. Why should not the one man who had the power to give her a moment's happiness pay some small portion of the evil debt one of his race had created in thrusting upon her the long wretchedness of life? But if Miss Bess cared — Well, she would wait and see.

XIV

In June Margaret and Bess sailed for home, summoned by a cablegram from Dick, announcing that Aunt Dilsey had had a stroke of paralysis. Dick met them in New York with the information that she had recovered her power of speech and was perfectly conscious, but that the end was not far off. They hurried home, and to Margaret's lasting comfort arrived in time. For several days Aunt Dilsey lingered, in deep content, her tired eyes turning from Bess to Margaret, and back again to Bess, until at last she closed them, and stepped from her worn old body into the country of ageless life.

She lay in state in the first of the great parlors, like a true retainer of the old house. Like Margaret herself she had been married in that very room. Her old mistress's minister had performed the ceremony, and her old mistress had fastened her wedding veil in place, and arranged its folds over the white dress which had been one of her many gifts to her favorite slave. The servants from the quarters had gathered in the back hall and on the veranda, and the house servants had stood in the parlors behind their master and mistress. There had been a dance and a grand

supper in the barn afterwards, and "ole Miss" had come out to see the bride cut her cake. To-day the room was again fragrant with flowers in her honor, and Ebeneezer, with his family, sat in the cool dimness about the coffin. In the second parlor, near the silent form which separated the two groups, were Mrs. Lawton, her children, Bruce, and several of the older ladies from the neighboring plantations. Bess sat by her mother, pale, silent, motionless, but Bruce saw the bright tears rolling down her cheeks and falling on her white dress. He had never seen her in tears before, and the sight moved him deeply. He looked at the calm face, the steady, unseeing eyes and quiet lips, and a great wave of tenderness passed over him, a new appreciation of the strength and depth of the nature that lay beneath the charm and sparkle of her outer manner.

Just beyond Bess, and within the front parlor, sat Viry. She too was pale and silent, but she shed no tears; and if her eyes saw only Bruce and Bess, there was no one in the little group to notice it or her.

Margaret's eyes were bright and clear. Her hands were crossed lightly in her lap, her face was raised a little, and on it lay a light that seemed to Dick to shine from another world. However she might miss Aunt Dilsey in the days to come, her most vivid present consciousness was of union which no separation could

weaken, of ties which no shock could rend. Long ago she and Philip had looked death in the face, and found there life and love; and Aunt Dilsey's passage into the unknown seemed just now to mean a new nearness between her husband and herself, the sending of a fresh and living message across the voiceless chasm of the years.

When the simple services were over, they all walked through the yard and up the hill to the family burying ground, where, as had been promised years before, Aunt Dilsey's grave had been dug across the foot of that of her old mistress, and where later Margaret placed a shaft of spotless marble no purer than the old woman's faithful heart.

A week after Aunt Dilsey's funeral Bess came in to lunch one day a little late, flushed and half pouting.

"I do wish, Diccon," she exclaimed, as she seated herself, "that you could find some place to dig your wretched holes besides in my own pet stamping grounds. Why don't you go to some of those new farms mother bought? Nobody minds holes in them."

"You'll have to ask Bruce," said Dick; "that's his part of the job. But what pet stamping ground has holes in it now?"

"Everything," said Bess, petulantly. She knew perfectly well that it was "Bruce's part of

the job," as Dick expressed it, but she chose to ignore his existence. "I haven't looked for the big fishing-hole yet, but I don't doubt that's gone, too — water pumped out and the bottom scraped clear through to China. It isn't like the same place."

"Where is it you have been this morning, Bess?" asked Bruce.

"Oh, nowhere, specially," she answered carelessly, "it's the same everywhere. But I did want some daisies for the sitting room — they're mother's favorite wild flower, you know — and I went up on that second hill beyond the spring-house where the best ones always grew, and there isn't a single one left — nothing but dirt and darkies and phosphate; and one of those horrid old kilns burning and filling the air with gas. Nearly every beech on that whole hill is dead."

"The gas does kill out the trees," said Bruce; "it's a pity, but it can't be helped. And I'm sorry about the daisies, Bess; but the truth is, there isn't a square inch of this old plantation that wasn't a favorite haunt with both of us when we were children; and when tracks are laid in any direction to run the trams to the washer, we have to mine all the rock in that neighborhood before we move the tracks somewhere else. You see it couldn't be helped. But I can get you all the daisies you want."

"They won't be like those," said Bess, ungraciously.

Bruce flattered himself that he had spoken as one would to a child whom one wished to soothe, and Bess knew it and resented it; but she also knew, as might any one less blind than the cheerful and unconscious Dick, that there was an eager look in his eyes which is not called forth when a spoiled child needs soothing. Bess had given a deal of serious consideration to Bruce in the last year or two, but her meditations boded no ease for the young man whom she honored with them. She disappeared after lunch, and Bruce, settling his sun-helmet on his closely cropped head, started off a good two miles in search of some extra fine daisies.

Viry spent the afternoon in the little sewing room behind the sitting room. After Aunt Dilsey's death she had been brought into the big house to stay, and Margaret had fitted up for her an unused room opening on the back hall above the kitchen. Her school was closed for the summer, and she now assisted Margaret with the housekeeping, and spent so much of her time as she chose in sewing for Bess, which was her chief and most pleasant occupation. She sat there this afternoon while Bruce gathered daisies, stitching her heart into the tiny tucks, and telling herself over and over that the thing she wished for most of all was for Miss Bess to be happy, and if she cared, oh, if she cared at all — !

Later in the afternoon Margaret came downstairs, a book in her hand, and passed through

the sewing room. She stopped for a few minutes to look at Viry's work, and then moved toward one of the long windows which opened on the veranda. As she neared it, she paused and turned.

"Miss Bess is out somewhere, Viry, reading in one of her 'roosts,' I suppose. If she should come in and want me, tell her I am at the spring-house beech. And don't sit there and sew so steadily; you look tired. There's no earthly hurry about that work; take your time."

"I'm not tired," said Viry; "I like to sew."

Margaret went on across the veranda, down the side steps, and out of sight around the house, while Viry bent above her work, a bitter ache in her hungry heart. A moment later the front door opened, and she heard Bruce's step in the hall. She half rose, flushing and paling, and then sat down again.

"Bess!" called Bruce, "where are you, Bess? Is that you, Viry?" pausing at the open hall door. "Where is Miss Bess?"

"She's outdoors somewhere, Mr. Bruce; she's been out ever since lunch."

Bruce looked disappointed.

"I haven't time to look for her," he said; "I've been gone too long as it is. Here, Viry, put these things in water, won't you, and take them up to her room? She wanted them specially."

He handed her an immense bunch of daisies and hurried out again to the hall and through the front door. He turned so quickly that he did not see Margaret, who had come back for the fan she had dropped on the sewing-room floor, and who now paused at the window a moment, almost involuntarily.

Viry was standing with her back to the windows, her head bent above the bright blossoms. Margaret could see her face quite clearly as it was reflected in a mirror on the wall, but Viry saw nothing but the daisies, felt nothing but the warmth of the long stems straight from the hands of the man she loved. She knew herself alone in the great house, and she was deadly tired of the interminable restraints of life. For the moment she forgot even Bess. In the sudden outrush of her pent-up feeling it was to her excited and longing imagination as if he had gathered the flowers for her, and had given them into her hands, not as a servant and a messenger, but for herself alone. She kissed them passionately, and then, drawing them closer to her face, kissed again and again the stems where Bruce's hand had lain.

Margaret gave a low, inarticulate gasp and leaned heavily against the window, and Viry, lifting her eyes, saw in the mirror before her the white, drawn face. But the tide of feeling was too full and strong within her to fall back instantly, even at that sight; and in the mirror the

two women confronted one another, silent, motionless. Viry's face was flushed, her crimson lips parted, and for once her beauty had no blot, for in her eyes the pale iris had narrowed around the great black pupils and had been darkened by the stirring of the depths within. It was as if some withering blight had been withdrawn, and the girl stood up, brilliant, glowing, instinct with most vivid life. They faced one another, Viry flashing a proud defiance, Margaret with the ghastly pallor of the dead. So they stood, breathless, statue-like, until Margaret, with an effort which wrenched her whole body, straightened herself, standing clear of the supporting window-frame, and then by another effort turned with a slow, automaton-like movement, and went mechanically across the porch and down the steps.

Straight to the spring-house beech she walked, but with halting feet and blinded eyes. Once more she was in a numbed, lifeless world, where consciousness seemed blotted out. She sat on a root of the old tree, looking vacantly across the hills.

"Bess," she said at last, beneath her breath; "Bess — my daughter."

With the words she woke to passionate life. She rose to her feet, her slender white figure outlined against the dark trunk of the tree, her proud head lifted, her deep gray eyes ablaze. The patience of years fell from her like a husk, and all the scorn and contempt which might

have burned in the soul of Margaret Davison flamed in her haughty face. Then a new thought dropped into the angry depths and rippled across the surface of her look: it was in the girl's blood; she had inherited it; she had inherited it from Philip Lawton. The fire in her eyes wavered and sank. She would be just; for Philip's sake she would be just. By some strange turn of memory she heard the sound of her own voice, years before, as she sobbed by Philip's bedside — "It was love we needed, more love." Her eyes filled with tears, and she sank down on the sweet, thick grass. She would never fail in love to Philip again. This was what he had feared in that last moment; it was because of this he had despaired. She would carry the burden for him to the end: she would help the girl; she would talk to her, she would find some place to keep her safe from this temptation. There would be some way — for Philip's sake she would be shown some way.

Then into the troubled confusion of her thoughts Bess came again, and once more her face whitened and her eyes burned. Bess was Philip's child — and hers; infinitely dearer to him than this chance-born waif to whom he had merely wished to do his duty. Bess came first to Philip as to her. Whether or not Bess cared for Bruce Margaret could not say; partly because she had respected the girl's reticence on the one topic on which she had avoided discussion with

her mother; partly because she feared to know, lest she should find that the doom of womanhood had already fallen on the child: for she was afraid for Bess — afraid even with Bruce. And now — she set her lips. That he had given Viry the flowers for Bess she understood; but what had he said or looked as he did it, to bring that passion into the girl's face? What had passed between the two all these long months of her absence? Oh, nothing, nothing; she had known Bruce all her life! She had known Philip, too. She shivered and shrank against the tree. But she trusted Bruce; the boy had done nothing amiss; she would stake her life on it. And Viry had not changed in any way until he was gone; he did not even know. But if he should learn the truth — ah, then the test would come! And as for Bess, it would be better for her to learn the truth before it should be too late. The child might suffer — she might think she suffered; but what could she know of suffering, unwed, unfettered, her life her own to do with as she would? It was Bess, not Viry, who must be thought of first; surely her own anguish, her patience these many years, had won that right for her child. She would watch over Viry as best she could, and keep her from actual harm; but if a snare were spread for Bruce, and he proved a man to fall into it, in God's name let him fall, before her daughter's eyes should look into his with love!

She leaned against the tree, her eyes closed, her body spent with the storm which had shaken it. She did not hear Bess's light step on the grass.

"Why, motherkin, how pale you are!" cried the girl, dropping beside her and slipping an arm around her. "I'm afraid it's this sudden heat. I ought never to have said I wanted to stay at home this summer! And indeed, I'm quite melted into repentance already. Don't you see how run down I am, mother? Let's take Dick and go away."

Margaret's pale lips smiled.

"It isn't the heat, dear. There were just — thoughts. I am tired."

"I know," said the girl, reverently. "I often look at you, mother, and think things I scarcely dare put into words. You are so beautiful to Dick and me, our life seems so perfect together; and yet I know that to you it is only a poor maimed life, and that half your heart is dead. Forgive me for saying it, even for thinking it; but I have come to understand you just in this last year as I never did before, and all your grief and loss. I have been so happy in you, and so selfish. I'll never say it again, mother; I only want you to know this once that I have come to know something of what your life for us has been, and that I can never forget it, or cease to love you for it. There! I won't be solemn any more! It's dinner-time, and the

red raspberries are ripe; I picked a great bowlful all by myself. And Bruce brought me some daisies, and the sitting room is a dream; come look at your shrine, St. Margaret."

"Why didn't you wear the daisies?"

"Oh, they're your flowers; I wouldn't presume; I'm not fit to be canonized yet, you know. Besides, I like roses." She touched those at her belt lightly. "Mr. Hayne came out with Dick and brought me these. I asked him to stay to dinner."

"They are beautiful," said her mother, absently. Her mind was busy with its new certainty. She needed no words to explain to her why the last year had brought to Bess a new understanding of her mother's love and grief.

Viry meanwhile had spent the time in her own room, sitting in sharp tension, waiting for what might come. Her defiance of Margaret frightened her, and yet she rejoiced in it, come what would.

When the house finally fell silent, she crept into bed with a sigh half of relief, half of regret, that the storm was yet to break. But the next morning, as Margaret sat in the sewing room planning the day's work, she began to understand that there was to be no storm, at least in that dreaded quarter. But so deep was her distrust that it was long before she freed herself from the fear that her punishment was planned to come upon

her through Bess, or perhaps, in some unguessable way, even through Bruce himself. When these fears were allayed, she set down the mysterious respite to some hidden deadly purpose which was to wreak itself upon her unawares; while Margaret still delayed to speak to her, partly from a hopeless consciousness of the girl's antipathy to her, but chiefly from a deliberate determination to let Viry suffer what she must, that so, if there were a test, Bruce might meet it, and stand or fall, for Bess's comfort, or, at worst, for her salvation. This was a justice, she told herself, that Philip would well approve.

XV

"Aunt Margaret," said Bruce one morning, "will you drive to Fulton with me after breakfast? I want to talk with you about some business matters."

"I wanted to take mother for a drive myself," said Dick, "but I suppose I'm cut out."

"We can go to-morrow, dear; Bruce and business must come first."

"I'd like to know what's to become of me!" exclaimed Bess, in mock indignation. "Do you all suppose I'll sit in the ashes, like Cinderella, while everybody on the place goes gallivanting with my unnatural parent? If you'll await developments, Diccon, you'll find that you will take a horseback ride with your sister this morning. My locket ought to get here to-day, and I'm going after it myself."

"I can wait till to-morrow, Dick," said Bruce. "I have business in the village, too, and I can go there with Bess to-day."

"Never," said Dick. "Do you suppose I'd dare back out of taking her? You and mother go on."

"Bruce," said Margaret, as they drove off, "I wish you would tell me just what was wrong with Viry's school last winter. From one or two things you've said I inferred that you didn't think

it was a success; but what was the matter with it?" She looked at him keenly, but covertly.

"I reckon the principal trouble was that you weren't here yourself to keep a hand on things, Aunt Margaret. I hate to say anything about Viry, for you know I never could stand the girl somehow, and I may not be just to her. And in spite of my dislike for her, I felt right sorry for her this winter; she's had a hard time." He paused, flushing under his tanned skin. "To tell you the plain truth," he went on, "though of course you know it already, that girl is more white than black. That's why I never could put up with her, even when I was too little to understand my dislike. She's a monstrosity; the mere thought of her gives me the shivers. I've thought about her a good deal, too, this winter. She hates the darkies, and what's more to the purpose, she makes them hate her. She doesn't feel as an ordinary white person would, or an ordinary darky, but as a white person who was forced to associate with negroes on equal terms."

"That can't be helped, Bruce."

"Of course not; and she ought to have sense enough to see it, but she just won't. She's sawed those darkies off that tried to make friends with her till everything in the quarters is down on her. She may do better when you're here to help her and keep her straight as you do the rest of us; but if things aren't different, I'd ship her after another year."

"Where could I send her?"

"Heaven knows! But I wouldn't have her around here any more; she'll ruin your school. It will be hard on her to send her away from Bess; she's the only human she has ever seemed to care about; but I do think you've done your part by her, and I'd let her hoe her own row."

"Aunt Dilsey thought when I came home that Johnson Tyree was in love with her."

"Worse luck for him," said Bruce, flicking a fly from the horse's back; "hard on him if she won't have him, and a blamed sight harder if she will. Tyree deserves better luck; he's really a fine fellow. But I can't afford to waste our ride discussing darkies' love-affairs, Aunt Margaret; I want to tell you about my own plans. When our contract expires the first of January I want to go away."

"To go away! Do you mean you want a vacation? Why not take it now?"

"This is as good a vacation as I could ask — to have you all at home again. No, I mean I want to leave this part of the world — to go and seek my fortune, like the fellows in the fairy stories."

"Why, Bruce, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, except that I want money — a pile of it; and I mean to get it, or die trying."

"Money! Bruce, I do wish you wouldn't be so foolish. Why can't you do the mining on shares? And you'll have all you can use any-

way, when I die — if you're so hard-hearted as to make me wait so long. You are really one of my children, boy. Why should you go away for money?"

"I must make my own way, Aunt Margaret. That was settled long ago."

"Nobody settled it but you; I never agreed to it. You set too much store by money, dear; you actually let it cut you off from those who love you; it isn't worth so much."

"The money does cut me off — or the lack of it does. That's why I must get it out of the way."

"How will you do it?"

"I shall look for gold in some new mining region. I've saved up every penny I could, and I've made some besides, renting some land from an old fellow this side of Fulton who had only a small place and preferred to let some one else take the expense and worry of mining. I could only look after it at odd times, but I've made it pay. I have a few thousand dollars now, and if I can't strike 'pay dirt' myself, I can find some chap who has, and needs money to begin developing, and will let me in on shares."

"Where will you go?"

"To Labrador, first."

"To Labrador! In January?"

"I'll start then; I may have to stop on the way. Hayne was telling me about it. He met an old classmate of his in New York last spring,

a Harvard man, who was just back from making a survey for an English company up there. He says it's to be one of the world's great gold-fields, and it's newer, and therefore more promising for me, than the Klondyke."

Margaret was silent for a moment, and then asked, "How long will you be gone?"

"Until I make my pile."

"And then?"

"I'll come back and induce Bess to marry me, if I can," said Bruce, boldly.

"Bruce Carleton!" exclaimed Margaret.

"I know I'm not good enough for her; but nobody is, or could be, and I've loved her all my life."

"But I don't understand. You said you wanted money. Hasn't she enough for you?"

"She has too much," he answered. "If she were as poor as I am, I could ask her to marry me to-morrow. God knows I wish I could! But as it is —"

"Bruce," she interrupted, "suppose for one instant that Bess cared for you; would you go without a word of explanation and leave her to break her heart for you, perhaps, through years?"

"I couldn't speak, Aunt Margaret; I have no right. I'll be bearing a far worse uncertainty than that myself, for Bess must know without words that I love her, and I can't guess how she feels to me."

"Then take the more reasonable supposition

that she doesn't care; what sort of chance will you have off in Labrador, while there are other lovers in the world not quite so leisurely? Even if you make your 'pile,' what good will it do you when you come back and find Bess married to some one of the half-dozen men or so who have already asked her?"

"That's the hard part of it," groaned Bruce; "to go away —"

"Is what you'd better do, decidedly," interrupted Margaret, indignantly; "and I'd advise you never to come back with any notion of Bess in your head. It's out of the question."

"Aunt Margaret!" exclaimed Bruce, "don't tell me there's anybody else! Of course I know the risk, and I'm just an ordinary fellow; she's known me all her life, and I can't be a hero to her: but even when I've been half mad thinking how I must wait while other men were free to try to win her, I've felt somehow that she would care for me some day, I love her so. If there's somebody else —"

"It makes no difference whether there is or not," she answered. "I have never spoken to Bess on the subject — though I have noticed that she seems to prefer Mr. Hayne's flowers to yours."

Bruce winced; he had noticed it too.

"But that has nothing to do with it. The reason I want you never to come back is because you are not the man I thought you. You are not fit to marry her, or any one; you don't know

what love means. The hard part, to you, is your own suffering and risk, not the possibility of suffering to her. You put your pride first, and are willing to sacrifice to it not merely your own happiness, but that of the woman you say you love, provided she is so unfortunate as to care for you! I hope I have given Bess too high an ideal for her ever to content herself with such love as that!"

"Aunt Margaret, you are unjust. You know what you said yourself about Bess falling a prey to some fortune hunter; I want to offer her a love free from that imputation."

"We will leave Bess out of the question, if you please," said Margaret. "But for the sake of the man I thought you were, and for the sake of the next woman you may imagine yourself in love with, try to understand — Oh, Bruce," she broke off suddenly, her eyes filling with tears, "how can your mother's child set money above love?"

"I don't. But because I am my mother's child I will maintain my own integrity. You don't understand how a man feels. I will accept nothing from the woman I marry but her love."

"Well, you'll never get that if she's worth having and she hears you make such a speech. As if love counts who gives or who receives! Your love will be as worthless as your money; and neither of them will ever win Bess!"

"We'll see," he answered defiantly. "I'll have her yet!"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders.

"How pretty the fence corners are," she said, with an air of making conversation. "Did you notice that great clump of daisies we passed?"

"I can't say that I did," he answered grimly. He looked at her curiously. He had never noticed any especial resemblance between her and Bess; but now, as she sat upright, her chin a little raised, and an air of proud reserve about her which he had never before seen, the likeness was striking, notwithstanding Margaret's paler coloring.

"Dick was right," he thought to himself; "she was like Bess. I wonder if he was right about the rest of it."

Being only a man, it did not occur to him that this sweeping aside of the woman he had known all his life, and the revelation of the woman Margaret herself had almost forgotten until the day she saw Viry with the daisies, must have no less a cause than something which vitally affected one of her children. For herself she had mastered anger and resentment long ago; but to master them where Bess or Dick was concerned was quite another matter; and if Bruce had been shrewd enough, he might have measured his chance with Bess by the length to which her mother was moved out of her ordinary self. Not knowing this, he drove on gloomily, pondering Margaret's remark about Hayne's flowers being preferred to his. He did not doubt the

mineral wealth of Labrador, nor Hayne's belief in what he had told him of it; but he thought with sardonic humor of the pleasure the man must have taken in recommending a sub-polar region to a possible rival who was housed under the same roof with the girl he was openly trying to win. Well, he would go, and he would return; and he who laughed latest would laugh best.

Margaret sat beside him, apparently in chill indifference, though inwardly racked by the thought of Bess. She had kept the child's secret as she would have wished it kept, but her heart ached for the girl. She was, moreover, keenly disappointed in Bruce, and felt once more, with all her old agitation, that no man's love was fit to be trusted with her daughter's happiness. She had believed in Bruce beyond them all; and now he had failed utterly. She did not believe that Bess would continue to love a man for whose ideals her respect must be lowered; but her love would die hard.

"Have you told Dick of your plans?" she asked presently.

"No. I waited until I could speak to you."

She did not answer, and they rode on in a depressing and fitfully broken silence. It was a relief to both of them when they reached home. Dick overtook them at the gate and told his mother that Bess, not finding her package at the express office, had stopped in the village with

Molly Caldwell, and would wait for the afternoon train.

"But she had on her riding skirt," said Margaret.

"A little thing like that wouldn't bother Bess," said Dick. "She told Miss Molly she had come to get dinner and to borrow a skirt to eat it in."

"It doesn't matter," said Margaret. She only wished to be herself the one who should tell Bess of Bruce's plans, lest the girl should be taken unawares; she could do it as well to-night.

That afternoon she was in the sitting room, and Viry, having some question to ask about her work, sat on one of the old-fashioned ottomans before her, the garment spread out on both their laps, when they heard Bess in the hall. She came in with a long box in her arms, and throwing it down before her mother, dropped into a chair with every appearance of exhaustion.

"When I die, mother," she said weakly, "you can prosecute the clerk at the express office for murder."

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Margaret, while Viry's lips curved in sudden smiles.

"He 'fo'ced' me, as Parralee says, to bring that thing out here myself, and it's so wearing to manage a box like that when you want to gallop, and get down off your horse, too, for wild flowers. I'd as soon carry a broom — rather, for it wouldn't be so fat and troublesome."

"How did he force you, you foolish child?"

"He said it was too clumsy for me. He insisted I couldn't take it on horseback," she said in an injured tone; "and of course I had to do it. I hadn't carried it a hundred yards, either, before I wished I'd let it alone and sent Uncle Eb after it with a four-horse dray."

"Why didn't you take it back?"

"My pious care for the clerk forbade it, madam. He would have been puffed up with sinful pride for the rest of his mortal existence. But I did wish Mr. Hayne wouldn't be forever nagging me with flowers."

"Mr. Hayne?"

"He sent 'em. I had a note from him saying he had to stop over in Nashville on his way back from New York, but hoped to be down on the night train, and sent a few flowers to announce his coming. A few flowers, indeed! I'm sick of flowers! I just wish he'd had to lug them out on horseback this hot day!"

Margaret laughed, and began to untie the string. "You're an ungrateful piece," she said.

"I'm not, either," said Bess, opening her handbag and drawing a small package from it. "This is what I went to town for, mother, and it's too beautiful for words; I love you for it. Look, Viry."

She took from the box a round locket, rather larger than the usual size, covered on one side with exquisite pearls, and with her monogram

in diamonds on the other. Viry exclaimed in delight.

"But look inside," said Bess. She opened it and showed Viry two tiny miniatures, one of her mother, the other of her father.

"Mother had them done for me in Paris," she said. "She wanted her own to be a copy of a picture taken at the same time with father's, but I wouldn't have it. Her face hasn't changed a mite, but I like her hair better the way she wears it now. We left Paris in such a hurry we couldn't get the locket, so she ordered it made in New York after we were settled at home. Mother, you don't know how pleased I am; I've wanted something with your picture in it for ever so long — something I could wear day and night."

"I'm afraid that's not very suitable for such steady wear," said Margaret.

"Yes it is; I'll wear it under my waist except in the evenings; my true love's picture next my heart, you know. If it were not really beautiful, I wouldn't put my 'bitter-best' sweetheart in it at all."

"Aren't you going to open your flowers, Miss Bess?" asked Viry.

"I suppose so," said Bess, jerking the box toward her. "Oh, but they are beauties!" she exclaimed as she raised the lid. "I am glad I brought them out, after all." She lifted two or three of them and brushed them against her cheek caressingly.

"Miss Bess," said Viry, eagerly, "do you really like Mr. Hayne?"

"H'm," said Bess, reflectively, "I like his flowers. I like 'em amazing well; only there are too many of them; they're so perfect that each one ought to be in a vase by itself." She threw her hat on a chair and held a half-opened bud against her hair, turning toward the mirror as she did so. "Nobody ought to be able to buy such a quantity of loveliness," she exclaimed. "I declare, mother, it's downright common to be so rich!"

"Why, Miss Bess," laughed Viry, "you're rich yourself."

"Don't you believe it," said Bess, lightly, putting another rose in her hair and turning her head the better to view the effect; "as long as my precious mother can contrive to give money away twice as fast as Bruce and Dick can make it for her, she'll spare her children that disgrace."

"Bess, will you ever stop talking nonsense?"

"I don't know, mother; not if I keep on enjoying it. And bless your heart, I don't mind your propensity for giving things to people — not while so many of them come my way." She glanced at the locket and smiled at her mother.

"How would you look in red roses?" she asked, catching up two or three and holding them against her mother's dress. "Oh, perish the thought! Here, Viry, give me your scissors;

and do get some vases for those things. You may have some yourself if you want them."

She ran out through an open window and came back with a handful of white tea-roses, which she fastened in Margaret's hair and on her breast, falling back when she had finished to admire the effect. "You ought to have your portrait painted this second!" she exclaimed. "It was so sweet and thoughtful of you to be beautiful, mother; if I had to have an ugly mother, I'd die of chagrin!"

She turned to the table and began putting the flowers in the vases, stopping when about half of them were in water.

"That's enough," she said; "they're too pretty to crowd, and I don't want so many vases. Help me put them where they belong, Viry, and we'll take the rest upstairs. I'll wear two or three of them, and you may have the others."

Viry carried some of the vases out, and when she returned Bruce and Dick were in the sitting room, and Bess's whole manner had changed. She was bending over the roses, filling the remaining vases with an air of absorbed admiration.

"Who's been cornering the rose market?" asked Dick.

Bess looked at him with gentle innocence. "Mr. Hayne sent me these," she said.

"Must be a fine crop this year," said Dick. "Put one in my buttonhole, won't you?"

Bess hesitated. "I want to put these in water, Diccon. Here, I've one left over from those I cut for mother in the garden; you may have that. It's a beauty." She pinned it in his buttonhole, while Bruce frowned at the window. "Help me carry these others up to my room, Viry," she went on sweetly. She gathered them up carefully, and they went upstairs together, Bess laughing softly to herself.

"There," she said, laying two or three on her dressing-table and giving the rest to Viry, "take them, with my blessing; and as soon as you put them in water, do come help me dress; I'm awfully late."

And so it happened that Mr. Hayne, coming down by an earlier train than he had hoped to catch, and hurrying out as soon after dinner as possible, found the family in the sitting room, and Bess herself at the piano, decked in his roses and singing love-songs, apparently with all her heart. She rose as he entered, and notwithstanding his protests, seated herself in a chair near one of the windows. Dick added his entreaties to Hayne's.

"You ought to sing for Bruce, if for nobody else," he protested. "You would if you knew what he expects to do. He's about to run off and leave us for good and all; he hasn't six months of civilization before him. When he's frozen up in Labrador next winter he'll be past singing to."

Margaret's heart stopped beating for an instant; she did not dare look at Bess. She had not thought of the possibility of Bruce's telling Dick so soon, and reproached herself bitterly for her carelessness.

Hayne, with a self-denial which did him credit, turned deliberately and began to look through the music lying on the piano. He had long feared Bruce as a possible rival, and was desperately anxious to know how Bess regarded him; but he would not take advantage of her to find out. So he turned away, while Dick smiled at his sister, and Bruce watched her with hungry eyes. But any one might have looked at Bess. The hand which was hanging at her side, next the window, closed sharply on her fan, but her color neither rose nor faded, and she looked straight at Bruce himself with the perfection of friendly, impersonal surprise. "Are you really going to Labrador?" she asked, in the most natural tones.

Bruce nodded, paling, and setting his lips.

"What is wrong with Tennessee that you should go to housekeeping with the Eskimos?" she demanded. "I consider it a reflection on mother, to say nothing of the rest of us."

"I'd like to take your mother and the rest of you along if there were any decent place to stay," he replied. "I think that much of Tennessee."

Bess shrugged her shoulders. "Mother and Dick may go if they want to," she said carelessly. "I never had any taste for snow-huts and

whale-blubber myself. I wish you joy of it. Mother, it's a shame to stay here in the house any longer. Why aren't we out on the porch, like sane people ? "

They all rose. Hayne held the curtain aside as the women passed out, his eyes bright with relief and hope. It occurred to him that he had really been very foolish to take it for granted that Bruce was in love with Bess; it was a lover's natural jealousy, he supposed, but probably Carleton's affection for her was of the same brotherly type as Dick's. He turned his head to smile at Bruce with a friendliness he had never felt before, but brought his glance back quickly, thoroughly sorry for the man whose secret he had surprised. Bruce had stopped at the centre-table, behind the others, and was looking after Bess in utter forgetfulness of his surroundings, and with an expression of such passionate longing and despair as might have moved a harder heart than Hayne's. He had not known how much he had hoped for some sign of emotion in Bess when she heard he was going away. He had meant to tell her himself, and to let her know that he hoped to return; but evidently she cared nothing for him: it was useless to hope for anything until he was free to tell her all his heart and to try to awaken her love; and meanwhile Hayne — he ground his teeth as he turned and went out alone through the hall.

Meanwhile Hayne, indeed, was spending a

most delightful evening. Bess was in one of her gayest moods, and with every moment his spirits rose, though Viry, sitting solitary on the back porch and lifting her tear-stained face to the night, could have told him some things which would have disquieted him as much as they would have comforted Bruce. But no one was thinking of Viry.

XVI

JULY ended in a blaze of heat, and the drought Ebeneezer had anticipated held the land in its grip. Beneath the dust which lay thick upon them the leaves grew thin and dry; by day the fiery air scorched and burned, and the dewless nights brought no healing to the seared fields. Early and late the negroes worked, thriving in the heat wherein all other life fainted, and the long kilns rose on every hand, burning through the burning days and pouring out their poisonous fumes to complete the destruction of such vegetation as had escaped the drought. Wherever the men were Bruce was, directing, urging, controlling, his hand on every movement of the whole great camp. In vain Margaret besought him to take a vacation, to close the mines, to run them on half time or at lower pressure — anything to enable him to rest. He was looking worn and thin; but he had determined to use the dry season to such good purpose that Dick would have no trouble in filling his orders during the coming winter, and turned a deaf ear to every suggestion for his own comfort.

"I don't see any use in Dick's staying here

just because Bruce will be so pig-headed," said Bess, one evening, when Bruce had gone to the office and the two sat with their mother on the porch. "I know you have always said you wanted to be cremated, mother, but you surely don't care to have it done before you are dead, do you?"

Margaret smiled. "There's no danger," she said.

"Diccon," said Bess, "you'll have to help me. You know perfectly well mother's not going to budge without you; she's been away from you too long, and wherever you are she'll stay; but she's simply wilting in this heat. How soon can you be ready to go?"

"At a day's notice," said Dick, promptly; he had been worried about his mother, too.

"Very well; this is Tuesday night. That means you will be ready to leave Thursday morning. We'll take the six o'clock train."

"For what place, if you please?" asked Margaret.

"I don't know, and I don't care," said Bess, rising. "I'm going to pack this minute. We'll go to a cool place somewhere; you and Dick can settle the rest."

She went to the door, and then came back again, pausing by her mother's chair.

"Mother, mayn't I take Viry if she wants to go? I really do need a maid, mother; I'm just as feeble!"

"I don't think Viry would care to go as your maid."

"Yes, she will, if I want her. And she does look dreadfully. I don't care what Bruce says about her school, I think there are two sides to it. She had a wretchedly hard time, and she did her best; and I don't want to go away and leave her without even Aunt Dilsey for company. Please, mother."

"Very well, child, if she will go."

"Oh, she'll go," said Bess, dropping a pecking kiss on her mother's head and turning back into the house. "Thank you, mother."

She ran into the house and upstairs, calling Viry as she went, and telling her plans breathlessly. Viry caught her enthusiasm, accepting eagerly an offer which, had it come from Margaret, she would have refused at once. The two routed out one of the men-servants and had a couple of trunks brought down into Bess's room, where they fell to packing with much laughter.

"Miss Bess," said Viry, presently, "don't you pack. I can do it all if you'll just tell me what you want."

"Oh, it's fun to pack," laughed Bess, "especially when you don't know what kind of place you're packing for. We'll take every rag the family has, and we won't come back till frost."

"But I can do it," persisted Viry.

"You can't, either," said Bess, "and I'll be too busy to-morrow to do much of it then. I've forty

thousand things to do, and I'll be obliged to go over and see those wretched Simmons children. I can't have mother traipsing through the heat, and she won't stir a peg unless somebody goes. I wish they were all dead; they'd be a lot more comfortable."

"Are they so wretched?" asked Viry.

"Of course they're wretched with that beast of a father. I cannot stand that man — and mother's so hopeful of him! He's what Aunt Dilsey used to call a varmint. I wish Bruce would knock his head off; then we could do something for the children."

Viry laughed. "You're bloodthirsty to-night," she said. "How can Mr. Bruce knock his head off when his neck's so thick? You'd better give him poison."

"I would, cheerfully, only mother's so prejudiced about things like that; she'd be certain to find some objection to it. No, I'll just have to go down there to-morrow and make an auto-da-fé of myself on the way."

She set out, when the time came, in the best of spirits, protesting to Margaret that a drive was the only thing to cool one off in such weather, and carrying in the buggy, in addition to the supplies sent by her mother, a basket of goodies which were to console the tribe of Simmons when it learned of her approaching departure.

"I'll be back in plenty of time to entertain

your company, mother, so don't worry. It's too bad that bald-headed old object should turn up just now and have to be asked to dinner; but you go and lie down and take life easy," and she drove off down the road.

She stayed some time with the small Simmonses, inquiring into their affairs and heartening them up generally. In response to the howl which arose when she told them of her going away, she brought forward the basket and proposed a picnic under the trees by the road; and here, not long after, Mr. Hayne discovered her, as he rode by on his way to her home. He reined in his horse in some surprise, and Bess, with a few laughing words, tore herself from the children's embraces and came out into the road through a gap in the fence where he let down the rails.

"Here, boy," he said to one of the children, "can you ride my horse up to Mrs. Lawton's for me?"

"Betcher life," said the boy, grinning.

"Do it, then; this is for your pains." He flipped him a dollar, which he caught and stared at, open-mouthed. He had never had so much money of his own in his life. He mounted the horse in a dream and rode off up the road.

"I throw myself on your mercy, Miss Bess," said Hayne, turning to her. "Have you room in your buggy for a poor wayfarer, and will you take him in?"

"You'd think there was room for half a dozen if you'd seen what was in here when I came down. Jump in." She glanced at her watch.

"It's earlier than I thought it was; if you like, we can go for a little drive — just a wee one, for mother is expecting a guest to dinner, and I want to be there when he comes; mother isn't well."

"I shall be thankful for even the shortest drive," he answered. "May I ask who the guest is?"

"Just an old gentleman we met on the steamer coming home — a Mr. Donelly. He used to live in Fulton years and years ago, and knew my father slightly. He told mother he expected to come here this summer, and she asked him to let us know when he came. He has just arrived, and as we are going away in the morning, mother asked him to dinner to-night."

"Dick telephoned me you were all going away in the morning, and asked me to dinner, too," he said, smiling; "I hope I won't interfere with Mr. Donelly."

"You'd better interfere with him! You must help entertain him. He's a good-natured old soul, but as deaf as a post. He tears my lungs to tatters. I'll need to go away to recuperate."

"You'll have a charming trip. I was there once, and —"

"Oh, it's a secret!" cried Bess. "I told Dick my part was to induce the family to go, and to

do the packing, and he and mother could decide about the place. I won't know where it is until we're there. I'll be guessing every time we reach a city or a junction, wondering where we'll branch off."

"I'm glad I'm not left so completely in the dark," he answered. "I expect to take a vacation soon myself, and I'd like to spend it there, if I may."

"It's in a free country, isn't it?" asked Bess.

"One is never free where one is unwelcome."

Bess looked surprised. "I can't answer for the natives, of course," she said, "since I don't even know who they are; but if they are not as cordially minded as they should be, mother and Dick and I will do what we can to soothe your feelings."

"If you will answer for yourself, that is all I ask." He paused a moment, and then let the impulse so often checked have way. "It is you, and you only, that I would come to see. You must know that; you must know —"

"I know that we are excellent friends," said Bess, quickly, giving him a full, direct look from her dark eyes. "You don't know how much I have enjoyed and appreciated your friendship, Mr. Hayne. Most of the young men I know try to talk sentiment to me, either because they think I haven't sense enough for intelligent conversation, or because it amuses them for the time to fancy themselves in love; and I have

liked you so much because you were not like that. I am never afraid of your forgetting that we have pleasanter ground to meet on than that of sentiment, or of your dropping into — 'maudlin ways' I used to say," she wound up, laughing; "I don't call people maudlin to their faces now, but I think it just the same. I'm so glad you're not maudlin!"

"I will be whatever you wish," said Hayne, slowly, "and for as long as you wish. May your friend who is not maudlin come to see you?"

"I will be charmed," she said cordially. "We won't say good-by, then, but *au revoir* in that happy land where there are no hot days and no Simmonses."

"Simmons? Is that the name of your friends?"

"Oh, mother's friends, not mine — at least the Simmons-in-chief is. Mother and I nearly come to blows about him. These children are afraid of him, and they won't tell me a thing against him, but I know he treats them dreadfully; but mother thinks he must love them because though he has eight children of his own, he refuses to part with the two older girls, who are his wife's by a former marriage. I should think he would refuse, while they drudge for him as they do, the selfish pig! I started to give him a piece of my mind one day. I was going to the place where he hauls the wood for the kilns, but Bruce stopped me and made me promise to let him alone. Bruce says he's a dangerous man."

"Yet he employs him?"

"That's mother. Bruce wants to send him to the penitentiary, but mother's reforming him, and she won't hear a word of it. He used to be a foreman, but Bruce found him cheating, so he put him back at hauling wood."

"If he's dangerous, I should think Mr. Carleton would better be careful after that."

"Oh, Bruce isn't afraid. Nobody would dare to attack him."

"The Cottons dared, and it was more good luck than anything else that he wasn't hurt."

"The Cottons?" asked Bess. "Who are they?"

"Didn't you know? I'm sorry I spoke of it. He must have wanted to keep it from you; but it has been county talk to such an extent that it never occurred to me you hadn't heard of it."

"Well, it can't be kept from me now," she said, smiling; "I'm on the trail. What was it?"

He told her the story, and this time he watched her, since she herself had called for it; and as he saw her proud face and kindling eyes, he thought, once more, what an excellent place Labrador was for a young man of Bruce's attractions. At the same time he comforted himself with the reflection that her admiration would scarcely be so open and unembarrassed if Bruce were a really dangerous rival. The more he reflected, the more he was comforted. She had repulsed him because her heart was not yet

awakened. He might not in the end be the favored lover; hopeful though he was, he was not overconfident; but the girl was pure gold through and through, and if it were possible, he would win her.

Bess broke in on these meditations suddenly. "It does seem to me that that sun is remarkably low for the time of day; I wonder if my watch is right." She looked at it and uttered a little exclamation of dismay. "It has stopped! It hasn't budged since I looked at it before! What time is it, Mr. Hayne?"

"Five minutes to six," he replied. "I had no idea it was so late, Miss Bess."

She was turning the horse even as he spoke, and flicked her whip about the animal's ears.

"I'm sorry," she said; "but no matter how hot it is, you must travel."

They flew along the road, leaving a smother of dust behind them. As they drove up the avenue before the house, Bess leaned forward a little with a resigned sigh.

"I knew it! There's his poor old bald head shining in the sitting room. Jump out, Mr. Hayne, and help mother scream till I come. I'll drive round to the side."

She drove round the house, threw the reins to the waiting servant, and ran through the back hall and up the back steps, calling as she went: —

"Viry! Viry! Do come help me dress! I'm scandalous late, and in such a hurry!"

Viry was out of her room and at the door of the hall before she reached it herself, and the two ran to Bess's room together. Bess flung her hat on the bed, snatched off her collar, and dropped her locket on her dressing table, talking as she threw her things right and left.

"Don't stop to put things away now, Viry. I left the dress I want in that drawer — the white one you made me; and get the chain I wear when I put the locket outside. Oh, Cæsar! I do believe I've packed up the last slipper I possess!"

She flew at the trunk wildly, while Viry took out the dress, delighted, as Bess knew she would be, at her choosing one which she had made. They both fell frantically to work, and in an amazingly short time she was almost ready. Viry was slipping the ribbon around her waist when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Bess.

The door opened a little, and through the crack was inserted Parralee's full moon face, surmounted by a big bandanna handkerchief. Her portly person followed it slowly.

"Is you mos' ready, honey?" she inquired. "Yo' ma got strange comp'ny, en my dinner's des natchelly gittin' sp'iled; ef hit dries up a leetle mo', I'll lose my name er bein' de bes' cook in de county."

"I'm ready now," said Bess, catching up her locket, and trying to fasten the chain. "Oh,

what is the matter with that clasp? Never mind, Viry, I haven't time; I won't wear it this evening; put it away for me. Your dinner'll be perfect, Parralee, it always is; but if by a miracle anything should go wrong, don't you worry; I'll ogle that old gentleman till he won't know whether he's eating codfish or ambrosia. Thank you ever so much, Viry," and she was gone, in a flutter of lace and ribbons, down the hall.

"She air de purties' chile in de Nunited States," said Parralee, proudly, looking after her. "But ef she gone, I got ter see 'bout dishin' dinner." She turned her bulk toward the back hall, chuckling ponderously as she went. "Codfish! Miss Bess must er got de name er dat w'ilst she wuz up dar wid de Yankees; she ain' never seed no sich truck in Par'lee's kitchen, sho'."

Viry lingered, straightening out the disorder of the room, and putting into the trunks the few things left in the drawers. Then she took up the chain, slipped the locket from it, straightened the clasp, and, putting it into its box, dropped it into the trunk. The locket she held in her hand a minute, turning it over and admiring it afresh; then, idly, she opened it to look once more at the pictures Bess had showed her within it. As it fell apart something fluttered out to the floor; she stooped to pick it up and saw that it was a head of Bruce, which she recognized as cut from a kodak picture Dick

had taken of the family just before Bess left for Europe. It was only a year old, but its worn and dimmed condition showed that it had seen constant service. Bess had carried it about with her long before she had slipped it into this locket between her father's and mother's pictures. She stood with it in her hand, looking down at it, and recalling word by word what Bess had said about the locket and its uses the day she brought it home.

She had been almost sure that Bess cared for Bruce that day when she watched her with the roses; indeed, for a time she had been quite sure. But the hope to which she clung, poor and unworthy as it was, was all she had to feed her love upon; and so, against reason, she had again allowed it to spring up. Miss Bess would do almost anything, she told herself, for pure love of teasing; she might only have wanted to tease Mr. Dick. But what she had now come upon must put an end to hope. She put the picture in its place again, and laid the locket down, growing very pale. She went to the window, and leaned against it, looking out into the moonless, torrid night.

In Viry's thoughts it rested with her whether or no Bruce should be true to Bess; and this was not because of any cynicism, nor from any sign of regard in the man himself; but because when one is young and strong one must live, somehow; and when all the natural outlets are closed, and

love and joy and companionship are impossible in the everyday world, one builds another world of dreams; a world where imagination waits on hope, and only those thoughts enter over which hope bears rule. In Viry's dream world Bruce would love her, at least enough to ruin his love for Bess; so that in her thought it was essential to Bess's peace that she should give him up. To her the sacrifice was real and present, and love could call upon her for no greater gift. Moreover, it was love alone that called; she had no sense of duty to herself or to Bruce. The evil inheritance was in her blood, and now that her blood was stirred, it lifted itself boldly and without reproof. For religion she had only contempt, and defiance for the God of whom it spoke. He was Margaret Lawton's God, the complacent deity of those who sat at ease to worship him, while neither he nor they cared for the dogs who crawled beneath the table to feed their starved life upon the crumbs.

And Bess had so many things, her life was so rich and full; she threw love away as she went, in sheer carelessness of that of which she already had so much. Why could she not be satisfied with her mother and Dick? Mr. Hayne loved her — a man with whom no girl need find fault; and there were other men. She had had everything, always, and Viry had had nothing: should she kill her one hope for Bess? She stood by the window, cold in the breathless heat. Her mind

went back to her childish days, and once more she raged against Margaret, resented Bruce's rudeness, and passed with scarcely a thought Dick's impersonal aloofness. But through all the days, however bitter or dark, Bess flashed like a thread of gold. She was the joy of life, its light, its soul; impatient and proud to others often, but to Viry always the same, her champion, her defender, her friend. Tears welled up in the wide, dry eyes, the set lips parted and quivered. It had not been given Viry to know much of love, but the gleam she had caught she followed. She fell upon her knees, her forehead against the window-sill.

"Oh, take him!" she sobbed; "I give him up! Miss Bess, I give him up!"

XVII

The drought was not broken until late in August, when for two or three weeks the constant rain seriously interrupted Bruce's mining; but when at last the weather cleared the parched earth was fresh and green, the trees had taken on new life, flowers rioted in the garden as if spring had come again, and Tennessee's long golden fall had begun, wherein heat is so tempered with coolness, and cold so shot through with sunny warmth, that from the breaking of the summer heat until January it is a climate fit for the gods.

Bess had said that they must remain away until frost; but that might have meant until deep in November, and both Margaret and Dick were anxious to return, as indeed was Bess herself, though she would give no sign of it. So the end of September found them at home again, and Dick hard at work once more in an effort to induce the negroes to cast their ballots for law and order. It was still a year before Martin's term of office would expire, but with a view to strengthening his hold upon the negroes he had managed to reopen the long-settled question of prohibition, in the hope of throwing the whole

county, as well as its two towns, open to the liquor traffic. The better element of the people was thoroughly roused, and an effort was being made to drive the bar-rooms out of Fulton and the village, as well as to keep them out of the county. Drinking, and its attendant lawlessness, had increased alarmingly under Martin's rule, and the negroes in the mining camps were for the most part of a class to constitute under present conditions a serious menace to the welfare of the section.

Dick threw himself into the contest with all his heart, and for once found solid backing in the white part of the population, as well as among the better class of negroes. Hayne worked with him cordially, but Bruce would have nothing to do with the campaign from first to last.

"I'll come in on the home stretch," he said one evening, "and bag more votes than you and Dick together, Mr. Hayne."

"You don't mean that you intend to coerce them?" asked Hayne.

"I certainly do," answered Bruce. "I'll get every mother's son in this camp, too!"

Hayne looked at Dick incredulously. "You don't believe in that sort of thing, do you, Lawton?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Dick; "I didn't; but sometimes I think Bruce is half right. I believe in doing everything possible to teach them —

Bruce is wrong there; but whether a community should wait for decent government until such men learn their lesson — I don't know. There are dangers either way. Theoretically it's an outrage to coerce a man's vote; but practically, if these negroes and the white men who are using them are turned loose a little more, this county won't be a safe place for anybody to live in."

"Surely, it's not so bad as all that," said Hayne; "though there is a deal of lawlessness, too: but I think the election can be won by fair means. The negroes themselves are at work."

"Yes," said Bruce; "men like Tyree and Uncle Eb and the preachers. And for every one of them there are a hundred or two of the camp negroes who will stand in for anything Martin wants badly enough to pay them a drink to vote for it. I'll see to the votes of this camp as a matter of principle, but it won't do any good; Martin's crowd will make a clean sweep, and you'll see it."

It was the morning after this conversation that Tyree came into Dick's study to report some of his work among the negroes. When he left the room he walked on down the hall to the sitting room, where he usually reported the sick to Margaret. He knocked at the open door.

"Come in, Johnson," said Margaret, looking up. "What is it to-day? Is any one ill?"

"No, Miss Margaret. I came about my own affairs. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Certainly. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," said Tyree, "but I'd rather stand up." He stopped near the door, in evident and unusual embarrassment. "I want to speak to you about Viry," he added, after a pause.

"Yes?" said Margaret. "Perhaps I can guess what it is," she went on, after another silence.

"I want to ask her to marry me."

"Then why don't you?"

"Because I'm afraid she isn't ready for it."

"Then it would be better to wait, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know. It's this way, Miss Margaret: I saw her in a terrible passion once last spring because Jim Mason, one of Mr. Carleton's foremen, had tried to make love to her. I came on her unexpectedly just as he was leaving her, and she hadn't had time to control herself. She seemed mad with everybody in the world; she was certainly mad with me. I don't understand. But if I speak to her too soon — if she's ever in such a rage with me as she was with Jim, she'll never get over it. I think she likes me better than the others; she will sit and talk to me, and she won't to them; but she won't go anywhere with me."

"What do you want me to do?"

Tyree twisted his hat, and looked embarrassed.

"If you could find out how she feels —" he said deprecatingly.

"Do you mean you want to know that the

girl cares for you before you will risk speaking to her?" demanded Margaret. "I couldn't spy on any woman about such matters, whether she were black or white."

"I don't mean that," said Tyree, earnestly; "I don't mean that at all. I only want to know if there's any chance of her listening to me without getting into such a fury. She could be friendly enough to say no kindly, I should think, and to allow me to go on speaking to her. If she'll do that, that's all I want to know."

"She may do that, but she will hardly do more, Johnson," said Margaret. "I wish she would. But she hates her own race. I don't believe she will ever marry."

Tyree did not answer. He was looking out of the window, and his face stirred Margaret's sympathy.

"I will speak to her," she said. "I can do it very well. Aunt Dilsey left a message with me for her about you. Aunt Dilsey thought you cared, and hoped that Viry would listen to you. I do not hope it at all, though I wish it, more for her sake than for yours. But I will try."

"Thank you, Miss Margaret," he said absently. He turned to go.

"Wait a minute, Johnson," she said impulsively; "I'd like to ask you something. I've wondered a thousand times if other educated negroes — especially those of mixed blood like

Viry — shared her hatred of their own race, or her desire to associate with white people. Don't answer me if you would rather not; but if you don't mind, I do want to know just how you feel about such things."

Tyree stood gazing into his hat for a few moments, and then looked at her frankly.

"Just for myself, Miss Margaret, I've seen the time when I would have given my right eye to be white," he said slowly. "You don't know, you can't imagine, what it is like to be one educated man shut in with a world of utterly ignorant men and women, and to see all round you another world that you could enjoy, a world of knowledge and wisdom and power, and to be an outcast from it. You can't think what it is like to walk the streets an educated man with a black skin."

He stopped in some emotion and looked at her again. He understood perfectly that the sympathy in her face was for his suffering merely, and not at all from any feeling that the conditions which produced his suffering were at fault.

"I feel differently now," he went on. "There must have been some purpose in making negroes. Even if God is left out, they must be better adapted to certain conditions than other races, or they would not be. How far their qualities can carry them nobody can tell. But I made up my mind that since I was a negro it was possible to

make being a negro worth while, and that I'd live to prove it; I wouldn't be ashamed, and I wouldn't be sorry; and I'm not."

"You have certainly proved that it is worth while, Johnson; both white and black feel that of you. And you don't feel as Viry does about the lack of white association?"

"I have it, so far as I need it," he replied. "You and Mr. Lawton have both helped me this morning. There isn't a white man around here who won't talk to me kindly and politely if I need it — except old Mr. Bruce," he added, smiling. "And every year lessens the loneliness of the educated negro among his own people. I have a number of friends — not only men like your Ebeneezer, but the preachers and teachers and their families. It is very different from what it was even ten years ago."

"But, Johnson," she insisted, "do you believe that it is really best, or merely inevitable, that the two races should remain apart?"

"Better for the white race, of course; and for the world, because, for as far as we can see, the white race is of so much more importance to the world than ours. If the good of the negroes could be separated from the good of the whole — but it can't be, in the long run. It is best all round."

"I wish you could make Viry see it," said Margaret, with a sigh. "If she could only be brought to see the reasonableness of law, and

that laws are not like rules, to be proved by exceptions —" She stopped, with the sense of helplessness which the thought of Viry always brought.

"You can do it better than I, Miss Margaret."

She shook her head. "I have no influence over Viry. I can find out, sometimes, what she feels or thinks, but I can never affect her feeling or thinking in any way."

Tyree turned to go, and Margaret sat long in her place thinking of Viry and dreading the performance of her promise. So far as Tyree was concerned, she felt quite certain of the outcome: the most she could do for him would be to spare him the outbreak which he feared.

It was late in the afternoon before she sent for the girl to come to her room. Viry answered the summons in some surprise. She sat down on the low seat under the window which Margaret indicated and turned toward her a somewhat disturbed face, thinking of the daisies and of the reckoning which she had always believed would come.

The day had been chilly and damp, and now that the light was fading a slow, heavy rain had set in. There was a little wood fire on the hearth, and Margaret sat with her side toward it, her face shielded by her hand from its flickering light, her eyes on Viry, where the light from the window fell full upon her. She half guessed the girl's troubled thoughts, and was glad that her words

would bring her relief. Perhaps the relief would make her more easy of access.

"Viry," she began, "did Aunt Dilsey ever say anything to you of what she hoped for your future?"

Viry shook her head in surprise. "No, Miss Margaret."

"She spoke to me. I don't know whether or not you ever quite understood how much she loved you, Viry. I think she loved Bess better than any one, though she would not have wanted me to think it; and next to Bess she loved you and me."

Viry waited, wondering what was to come.

"She felt quite safe about leaving Bess and me, because I have Dick, and Bess has Dick and me, so that we will be cared for always. She knew, of course, that all three of us would care for you so far as we could, but she knew that in some ways her death would leave you very much alone."

A sudden choking rose in Viry's throat, but she mastered it and looked at Margaret with clear eyes. She would show no grief before her.

"She left a message with me for you," Margaret went on. "I was to deliver it or not as I thought best. It was just a message of love, and of her hope that you would do a certain thing."

Viry's face had grown very pale; her throat was dry. "What was it?" she asked.

"Aunt Dilsey thought — rightly, I think — that Johnson Tyree was in love with you. She hoped — "

"I understand," said Viry, her eyes blazing. "You need not say anything more."

"I feared it would be useless," said Margaret; "yet you might listen, if only out of respect to Aunt Dilsey."

Viry lifted her head, her thin nostrils dilating.

"She left the message, you say, to be delivered or not as you thought best, and yet you chose to deliver it. I consider that it comes from you, and not from her; and from you it is a double insult!" She sprang to her feet; her face flamed.

"Viry!" exclaimed Margaret, lifting her head proudly, and then stopped, while the girl looked at her curiously, wondering, as she had often wondered before, why this woman bore from her what no one else, white or black, would dare to say to her. For her part, Margaret was thinking of Philip. She had expected Viry to be angry at the mention of Johnson's name, and what she really wished was to concede her position in regard to him, and to say something, if it were possible, which would help the girl to a better acceptance of her lot in life. That the lot was hard she knew, and for Philip's sake she wished to help her. She put her anger quite aside.

"I had no wish to insult you, Viry," she said quietly.

"You know how I feel toward negroes," answered Viry, still in the first rush of her passion, "yet you do not hesitate to suggest that I should marry one. But that is the least part." She stopped, half choked, the blood sinking out of her face, drop by drop. Then she went on again, slowly, but without hesitation. "You suggest my marriage to a negro when you know perfectly well that with my whole soul I love a man who is white."

Margaret herself had grown pale. "It is a madness," she said.

"Does any one know that better than I?" cried Viry, flinging her hands out wildly, and then clasping them tightly before her, as if to force them into stillness.

"Viry," said Margaret, "you will not believe it, but I am desperately sorry for you; I want to help you; but you will not let me."

There was genuine earnestness in her voice, and for a moment Viry's face half softened. Then it hardened again.

"What could you do for me?" she demanded. "What would you do? Would you open the door of my prison-house, and let me come to the people with whom I belong? Would you do that?" she repeated, her eyes piercing Margaret's.

Margaret shook her head. "I could not if I would," she said.

"No. And you would not if you could. Tell me, is not that true, too?"

"Viry, it is true; it is perfectly true; but listen to me, just for this once, for the sake of — for the sake of what I once hoped to do for you. Sit down again. Bring your stool here by the fire, and try to put your dislike of me away for a little if you can. Don't think that it is I who am talking; try to think only if what I say is true."

Viry pushed the stool before her to the fire, and sat down, half unwillingly.

"It is hard, always, to suffer," Margaret went on, "and I think it is even harder to realize that any one else's suffering can be quite so great as our own. The outside look of pain is so different from the inner experience of it that it is hard to understand that in another it is yet the same world-old anguish which we ourselves know so well. And yet none of our lives are without it; it singles out no person alone. It is as universal as the air, and as necessary, and as good."

There was a pleading note in her voice which moved Viry against her will. She might have softened toward her had she not recalled the ease of this woman's life, and how her words could only come from her lips, or at most from her brain — never from her heart.

"I think when a great sorrow is laid on one it is desperately hard to bear so long as one bears it alone, in an unrelated way. But if we can see that it makes for the highest things, not merely for ourselves — we may know that sorrow well

borne always does that, and yet just for our own good be unwilling to pay the price; but if we see that it makes for the best things for others too; that it is part of the law of life and love; that our small life is caught up by the great laws that have worked through the ages; that our sorrow is part, not merely of a great plan, but of the vital force that lifts the whole race of man — Viry, if you could see that your very suffering is the thing that makes possible for you a living oneness with the noblest life of all the ages, could you not bear it better then?"

"How could it be?" asked Viry, wondering, and moved against her will. "I don't see," she went on after a pause, and in a harder tone, "what vital force is served by the selfishness of a race which shuts the door in the face of a woman nine-tenths of whose blood is its own. What sense or reason is in that? What high thing is served by such brute exercise of power?"

"The race must be kept pure," said Margaret. "It has its work to do — the best work yet done by any race on earth; and those who spring from it, and yet are tainted with something lower — for the world's sake they must stand aside, and suffer. But suffering so for a sin that is not their own, they may yet suffer nobly, and be sure that through their sufferings, their loneliness, their separation from the life they long to share, they are doing their own high part in helping to work out the world's best good. Oh,

there are reasons!" she broke off, "reasons without end! But, Viry, there is something deeper than reason — there is instinct; and back of instinct is God."

"Instinct!" cried Viry, in scorn, the red blood burning in her face; "instinct against the union of white and black — and three million mulattoes to prove it! Look at me, one mongrel of them all, and say that instinct is against it if you dare! Look at me and say it!"

Margaret shivered, and her eyes turned quickly to the fire. She drew her chair a little closer to it, reaching her hands out to the light blaze.

"There is certainly no animal instinct against it," she said slowly, "and our animal instincts are the oldest things we have. But when out of the animal God wrought a man, new instincts were already coming into play, instincts that were higher, better, and sure to rule unless men were to drop back into beasts again. I have thought about it a great deal, Viry. I am not learned nor wise; but I have seen you, and others like you. I have been forced to think — to account for things I cannot deny. And I do it in this way.

"The old animal instincts war with the new and higher ones. We see it on every hand. When a man allows his family to suffer hunger that he may go full-fed, we say he is a beast, and it is true. The old instinct to gratify hunger has overridden the later instinct of parental self-

sacrifice, the beginnings of which are so plain in the higher beasts themselves. In sieges mothers have been known to eat their own children; it was the triumph of the animal instinct to gratify hunger, far older than the instinct to die for one's child. But is it fit to rule? Is not the other instinct true, and best to follow, no matter how often it is overthrown?"

Viry sat silent.

"Race instinct must have been the last one formed in us," Margaret went on after a pause; "it could hardly come until race consciousness grew up, and that comes late with every nation and race. When the negroes develop more of it it will be a help to us all. But that it is late in coming is no discredit to its truth; nor the fact that the old instinct sometimes overcomes it any proof that it will not triumph in the end as it deserves to triumph. Do you not see, Viry, that you yourself are a double witness to the truth of what I say? If your existence testifies to the strength of the old instinct, your hatred of the negroes is a proof of the inextinguishable power of the new."

Silence fell again, while Margaret waited.

"Viry," she said presently, "I have tried honestly to help you. Have I done anything that I wished?"

"No," said the girl, deliberately, "you have not. You are very clever, and you know how to put things. Some of them may be true: I don't

know, and I don't care. What I care about is my own life. What you said of sorrow sounded like — but you got it out of some book! Or you tried — honestly, I will suppose — to imagine what ought to be said to a poor wretch like me — said by a great lady who has never suffered anything that love or money or position could cure, but who thinks it very beautiful that those who starve for a drop of her abundance should be duly thankful for their pangs."

"Viry!" exclaimed Margaret.

"I suppose you think you are entitled to speak of suffering because you had a husband, and he died," Viry went on with growing bitterness. "You forget that you had him, and that he worshipped you, as every one says; that for all those years you drank the joy of life, that you had love at its best and fullest, that you can remember it always for the perfect thing it was! And as if that were not enough, think of your children, your friends, your money, your whole long life without a care or a cross. No wonder you think sacrifice beautiful when somebody else must make it that your ease be not disturbed!"

"I said it was hard to believe in any pain but our own," said Margaret, quietly.

"What pain have you felt?" asked Viry, fiercely. "By what right do you speak to me? Have you known shame or dishonor? Has your love ever been thrust aside or ignored? Have you laid your soul at a man's feet that he

might walk over it to another woman? Answer me that!"

She had risen, drawn up by the passion that had smouldered within her and now leaped into flame again. Margaret's face was white. She, also, had risen, and the two confronted one another.

"Never speak to me again of patience or suffering or self-sacrifice," cried Viry, "you who play at all three, and wonder that I, too, do not find them sport! Unless—" she checked herself and then went on, a flash leaping into her pale eyes, a deep red burning on her cheeks, "unless there is a God of justice, as you say you believe, and some day he brings your pride to the dust! When you can come to me and tell me that you are a dishonored woman, that your most sacred love has been spurned, that your heart has bled its life out, drop by drop, for sins of which you are innocent; that all that has come to you, and yet that you have risen above it all and have found peace in burying your own happiness, and joy in living for the great laws of the universe, then I may listen to you. When I see your healed wounds, I may believe in your cure; strip yourself and try it, if ever you have them to show!"

"Go!" said Margaret, as she said it once before. She raised her hand to lay it on Viry's mouth and snatched it back in an agony of memory — the same hand! Once more her face

was terrible to see, and Viry cowered before it. She pointed to the door and stood motionless, her power of speech consumed in the white fury of her wrath. Viry moved across the room slowly, mechanically, as if impelled by a force without her body, turning unconsciously as she did so, her wide eyes fastened on Margaret's face.

When the door closed behind her Margaret stood in her place conscious only of the fury that filled her. Presently she began to walk blindly up and down, her thoughts gathering fierce coherence. She had done all this for Philip's sake, that he might be spotless at the last. Not only had she forgiven him — that was a light matter in the strength of her great love — but restored to her as he was, repentant, purified, there was yet the stain upon him of the broken law whose penalty could not be remitted, the unchecked consequence of the sin which he had committed, the lawless life which he had sent into the world. She had tried to save him from it; she had tried to turn the curse into a blessing, that he might have nothing to regret at last, that he might prove the depth of her love, and rejoice in it and her. She had never counted the cost, she had stopped at nothing, nothing! She had brought the outcast to her own home, she had lavished upon her every possible help, she had borne to see her daily, to be kind to her, to suffer her daughter to befriend her — Philip's negro

child! She had done her best; Philip would say it; and this was her reward. The girl scorned all her sacrifice, and demanded as the price of her salvation a knowledge of the tragedy of their married life. She had saved Philip's honor at a cost no man might guess. Except herself, no living soul knew aught against him. She had borne with Viry all these years that God himself might say the blot was purged. And this bastard beggar must know of it, forsooth, and probe old wounds, and decide if the dishonor were deep enough to be worth her consideration; if the anguish matched her own, or topped it; if a wife could suffer like a girl unwronged! She drew sharp breaths between set teeth, her hands were clenched in the dark. Suddenly she stopped short in her wild pacing, as Bess's voice called in the hall to know if she were coming down to dinner.

The necessity of explaining quietly that she wished to remain in her room and to be left entirely alone calmed her somewhat, and helped her to regain her lost self-control. When she locked her door and returned to the fire her mind was clear and her course decided upon. Viry should leave the house. She had done her part, as Bruce had said, and the girl should go out of her life.

She lit the gas, and sitting down at her desk wrote to the president of the college where Viry had been educated, asking him to find a place for her to teach as soon as he could. To the first

place found she should go, and thenceforth Margaret would wash her hands of her. Until that time she would avoid her presence and endure the knowledge of it in the house as best she could.

XVIII

The fall deepened and brightened as the weeks went by. The year's work of the fertile earth was finished, the harvest for which she had lavished herself was gathered and stored away, and through the short, bright days she seemed to wait, in the consciousness of work well done, for the peace of the coming sleep and the joy of the wakening beyond it. For this brief time between work and rest, the crown of all the year, the beauty of all the seasons seemed pressed into one. The spring flowers burst into bloom again, unfolding their bright blossoms as serenely after summer's heat as after winter's cold. In the delicious warmth of mid-day and the soft haze about the hills, lay an afterglow of the summer's radiance, while the roses were the most beautiful of all the year; while the bare twigs beginning to show here and there through the thinning foliage of the trees proclaimed the beauty and the promise of sleeping life.

Viry was dimly conscious of the peace and triumph about her as she went daily through the fields to the little schoolhouse with a sore and bitter heart. But the thing she saw most clearly was the long struggle of the year and its endur-

ance before this peace was gained. The price paid seemed to her a cruel one, and greater than the peace was worth. She looked with pity on the bare wheat-field, stripped of its hard-won harvest, with only dead stubble left for its reward. They had not even given it the comfort of fresh work to do; it was to be gashed and hacked and torn out of all semblance of its fertile self, and the long kilns were to rise there, poisoning whatever life might stir between the gaping wounds. Day after day she went over the little foot-path, past the wheat-field, through the grove of trees in the still valley beyond, and up the hill to the school-house, reading her own thoughts, as we all do, into nature's face, which answers back all moods of every mind.

The conviction which grew upon her was that whatever the outcome of her life might be, the price of it was beyond her strength or will to pay. She lived in a cruel tension, for Margaret, absorbed in her own bitter sense of failure, and angered past endurance by the girl's insolence, had shut her out from her presence since that night. The president of the college had answered her letter promptly, but he knew of no vacancy for Viry. All the schools were supplied before the openings, and it was too soon for any vacancy to have occurred. After Christmas there would doubtless be a few changes, and he thought he could find a suitable opening for the second term; for the present he could do nothing.

Until she could tell the girl to go, Margaret could not bring herself to speak with her; and in her own bitterness she quite lost sight of the hardness of the uncertainty in which Viry's days were passed. That something must happen she knew, and she waited for it with alert and tortured expectation; but as the days and weeks dragged by, the acute suffering of the long strain was dulled, and the uncertainty merely added to the load of misery against which her mind was hardening to rebellion.

Meanwhile the election was close at hand, and Dick's persistent effort had so far influenced some of the negroes that the sheriff was forced to take notice of it, and to make an unusual effort to counteract it. In his present struggle he was backed by the powerful liquor interests, both within and without the state, whose thriving trade was threatened, so that there was a bank-account to draw upon far larger than local politics could have placed at his disposal; and after long thought and consultation it was decided that on the Saturday preceding the election the negroes should be given a barbecue in Wesson's grove, halfway between the village and the Lawton place. Food for two thousand men was to be furnished, and liquor without stint. The preparations went forward swiftly and secretly, and the negroes themselves were not apprised of the feast until the last moment. The matter was kept so quiet, indeed, that Dick,

who left home the Tuesday before to make shipping arrangements at several ports, knew nothing of it; and Bruce, even on the day appointed, heard of it only vaguely as to be held somewhere in the county, and had no idea of the scale on which it was planned.

Dick was to return on Saturday night, in order to be on hand in plenty of time for the election on Tuesday; and on Saturday morning Bruce, having business in Fulton, drove over to spend the day there and to bring Dick home in the evening. He went at a brisk pace, his horse sharing his enjoyment of the crisp, bright air, and reached Fulton before nine o'clock. He went at once to the livery stable where he always left his horse, and nodded to the darky who came forward touching his cap.

Half a dozen men, black and white, were lounging about, and among them Bolles, the sheriff's right-hand man, who kept the only bar in the village where a white man sold drinks to negroes. The man was notoriously corrupt from every point of view, and though Bruce, like many of his friends, might speak to the sheriff, he had never yet condescended to speak to Hiram Bolles. He recognized him at once, wondering carelessly what deviltry had brought the fellow to Fulton so early in the morning; but Bolles lifted his hat and stepped forward.

"Mornin', Mr. Carleton," he remarked with an ingratiating air, "fine bracin' weather for drivin'."

Bruce stared at him for a second and then deliberately turned his back, while the negroes tittered.

"Bring my horse to the hotel this evening in time for the six-thirty train from Birmingham, Pete," he said to the man who had first come forward. "Be sharp on time."

"Yassir," said Pete, fumbling his cap again. "Enny er de fokes erway, Marse Bruce?"

"Mr. Lawton is coming back," said Bruce; "I'm to meet him and drive him home."

He walked off rapidly down the street, and Bolles watched him with an evil look. He had several scores against Bruce Carleton, and not a few against Dick Lawton, too. Some day he meant to pay them off.

By twelve o'clock he was in Wesson's grove, and the negroes were coming in by scores and fifties. By two o'clock, the hour appointed for the barbecue, the big grove swarmed with them, a jostling, laughing, good-natured crowd, ready for anything that might turn up. The sheriff was on hand, too, a prince of good fellows, his genial manner tempered with just enough loftiness to remind the negroes of the honor bestowed upon them in being allowed to hobnob as equals with a white man. The barbecue was a grand success.

When the last mouthful of meat had disappeared the drinking began, and the sheriff, already surfeited with the company of his black brothers, nudged Bolles privately.

"I've got to meet some o' the liquor men in Fulton at four o'clock, an' I'm goin' to be late now," he said. "Shut off on this gang before they get too drunk to walk home. Keep 'em in a good humor an' break 'em into batches when they start to go. Don't let 'em make any trouble."

"Trust me," said Bolles, easily; "I'll manage 'em."

The sheriff rode off, a trifle anxious, it must be confessed, for with many of the men already half drunk the crowd threatened to become a mob with dangerous possibilities. Fortunately they were all in a good humor and likely to remain so; still, he turned his horse and rode back to Bolles.

"Look-a-here, Bolles," he said sharply, under his breath, "I'll hold you responsible for these niggers. Do you understand? I'll have no monkeying. If they do any damage, by the Lord I'll turn against you and throw the whole thing on your shoulders, and split on your past record besides. There are just one or two things that even I can't afford to be connected with if I'm goin' to make my way in this part of the world. I know you can manage 'em, and you've got it to do. I ain't goin' to take an excuse. Do you hear?"

"I hear you," said Bolles, sullenly. "What the devil's the matter with you?"

Martin rode off without answering, nodding

genially to the negroes as he passed them. Bolles watched him out of sight, and then turned to the men who were distributing the beer and whiskey among the crowd. He was in a rage, for the sheriff had spoiled his plan. He had known of the meeting in Fulton, and that the mob of negroes would be left for him to disperse, and it had suddenly occurred to him that morning, when he learned that Mr. Lawton and Mr. Carleton would both be safely out of his way until night, that this would be an excellent opportunity for his revenge on both of them. There would be no white man around to bear witness to what was said, and the negroes would be too fuddled to remember. In their condition it would be easy to inflame their avarice and every evil thing within them, to set them on the Lawton place to sack it and wreck the works, and to deal with the women as they would. For his own safety, he could lurk about until all his will was accomplished, and then make a bold, and of course useless, attempt at rescue. Nothing could be simpler, and he had been working out the details in his mind all day. But now he dared not stir. He could not fool the sheriff; and if his past record were to be shown up — at the mere thought the blood forsook his face, leaving it gray under its mottled purple.

He went about the grounds, speaking a word here and there, ordering fresh supplies of beer, the tide of baffled vengeance rising all the while

against the barrier which held it back. Suddenly a thought struck him, and his face half cleared; if he could not do the things he would, why not pretend to do them? He could give those proud Lawton women a scare they wouldn't get over in half a lifetime, and cut the comb of the men's arrogance in a way to make them remember and fear him. He chuckled at the thought. He had no fear of the negroes getting beyond his control. Drunk or sober they were afraid of him, and the great majority of them were merely melted by liquor into a more than ordinarily good humor. If he managed well, there was no real danger; but nobody at the Lawton place would know it. He began to move among the men with new energy, dropping a word to one group and another, until they were all afire with enthusiasm over the idea of celebrating the sheriff's coming victory on Mrs. Lawton's lawn. The whole thing was a huge, daredevil joke which just suited their drunken mood.

Bolles selected a number of the more sober ones as his lieutenants, and marshalled the wild horde into a fantastic procession. There had been at the barbecue some negro women of the baser sort, fifty or sixty of them, and these were scattered down the line on either side at intervals, while the men marched in the centre, six or eight abreast. Bolles himself headed the line. He meant to tell the sheriff that most of the men would go in spite of him, and that, finding it

impossible to turn them from their purpose, he had thought it safer to go with them, taking the more sober men along, and endeavoring to restrain the others from any real mischief, as the sheriff could see he had succeeded in doing. He impressed this view of matters on the befuddled negroes themselves, so that, even when they had grown sober, the impression remained with them that Bolles had gone under protest.

Margaret and Bess were in the sitting room, Bess at the piano, and her mother, her book dropped for the moment in her lap, looking out at the long shadows falling across the lawn, and calculating the time until Dick's arrival, when a hoarse sound, muffled by distance, fell upon their ears.

"What on earth is that?" exclaimed Bess, lifting her hands from the keys. "Do you suppose any of the machinery at the sheds has broken loose?"

The sound came again. Bess went to one of the windows and raised it. They listened in wonder to the dull roar as it drew nearer, until slowly separate tones detached themselves from the volume of sound and rose distinct upon the air in hoarse shouts and cries, behind and under which the great roar deepened and swelled, so that they mounted with an awful threat.

"What is it, mother?" asked Bess, the pallor of her face deadening to a ghastlier hue as she saw the horror in Margaret's. "Oh, look!" she

cried, turning back to the window at the sound of a savage yell.

The negroes had reached the great gate at the end of the avenue, and a few of them could be plainly seen passing through it, while behind them, through the trees, the two women caught glimpses of a dark mass, above which tossed the banners which had graced the grove at the barbecue, bearing legends in honor of the sheriff and free liquor.

Even as she saw, Margaret was fastening the heavy blinds and closing the window, while Bess sprang to the next one to close it. As she reached it she saw Viry in the hall, with Parralee, the butler, and two of the maids behind her, their faces ashen under the dark skin.

"Quick!" she cried, fastening her own window; "Molly and Jordan, take the other side of the house. The door, Viry! Parralee, the kitchen and back doors! Janie, the front windows upstairs!"

With a clear head to command them they shook off their cowering helplessness, and, with feet winged by fear, flew to their allotted tasks. Viry was as cool as Bess herself. As if by magic the great house withdrew itself from the outer day, and by the time the head of the mob had reached the flower-bordered walks about the house, it stood among the old trees closed and dark, like a deserted thing.

The little group gathered in an upper room,

where the butler and the maids cowered down in a corner, their teeth chattering with fear. Viry stood at one of the windows, peering through the blinds, with Parralee beside her. At another stood Margaret and Bess, each clasping the other's hand. On the table at Margaret's elbow she had placed the two pistols which the house contained, and which both she and Bess could use with deadly effect.

The crowd had spread out over the lawn, trampling the flower-beds out of all semblance of beauty, and now stood there, a rocking mass, rending the air with ribald jests and songs. The women had forced their way to the front, and in a little space which they managed to clear about the steps half a dozen of them began to turn handsprings like boys, their ragged garments fluttering in all directions, while the men roared and clapped their hands and waved the banners to and fro.

The negroes shouted until they were tired, and sang until the last indecency in their repertory was exhausted, and still the old house gave no sign of life. Bolles grew uneasy. It was quite possible that the two women had gone out to spend the day, the men being away, and that the silent building held only a handful of frightened servants. He wanted to know that the insult had found its mark. He was far from drunk, but he had swallowed whiskey enough to keep his insolence at boiling-point.

He came out from the dense black crowd and walked boldly up the front steps to the door, kicking it violently with his heavy boot.

Margaret's face had quickly regained something of its ordinary color. She saw that the present temper of the negroes was toward words rather than deeds, and that it would be quite possible to control them. She guessed that the one white man in the crowd, whom she knew by sight, had too much regard for his own skin to allow the demonstration to go beyond a certain point, provided he could remain in control: he merely meant to insult them. She was a brave woman, and a lesser thing would have stirred the Davison blood. When Bolles began to kick the door she turned instantly and went into the hall.

Bess said nothing, but caught up the two pistols. Giving one to Viry, she took the girl's hand in hers, and together they went down the steps after Margaret. Parralee, after an instant's hesitation, followed them, while the other three hung over the banisters in deadly fear.

The kicking at the door grew more violent, until the sound was suddenly broken in two by Margaret's flinging the door wide. Bolles recovered his balance with an effort and replaced his foot upon the floor. The negroes nearest the porch broke into appreciative laughter, which was echoed by those behind who had seen nothing.

Bolles's jaw dropped when he saw Margaret.

She was not at all in the terror-stricken state he had imagined; the color in her cheeks was brilliant, and her eyes were scarcely pleasant to face. She stood quite close to him, looking through him, her head raised, her whole presence breathing scorn. She did not speak, but continued to look at a point apparently just behind Mr. Bolles's head.

"Good evenin', Mrs. Lawton," he stammered, his hand going involuntarily to his hat.

"What do you want?" asked Margaret.

The negroes had all seen her by this time, and hushed one another to hear what she said. There was scarcely one of them who had not heard some story of her kindness to members of their race, and several had had personal experience of it. All of them knew that she had been "read out" in both the colored churches of the village as a friend of the negroes. They stared in admiration at her beauty, and took a genuine pleasure in her pride; she was real "quality, fo' sho'." Bolles cut but a sorry figure, and they grinned to see.

"What do you want?" she repeated.

"I want a drink o' water," said Bolles, calling up all reserves of swaggering insolence; "I reckon I'll come in an' get it."

Margaret stood just in the doorway, and as he moved forward to push past her, Bess stepped to her mother's side, a dangerous light in her dark eyes. She raised her pistol a little and

cocked it, softly but distinctly. Bolles stopped. As he stood irresolute, Margaret stepped past him suddenly and came to the edge of the porch.

The crowd waited, breathless. Before her face the negro passion for beauty, ignorant but mighty, stirred, drawing them dimly upward, while her eyes, quiet now, but commanding, searched those of the crowd. Her look held unconsciously the fearlessness, the sense of dominance, of security of power, of a race long used to mastery; and, as unconsciously, the men long born to obedience acknowledged its right to rule. An uneasy shifting grew among them. Eyes and heads began to turn back toward the avenue and the great gate, and again toward Margaret's face.

The women had moved first, but only to draw nearer to the woman on the porch above them. They huddled together, looking up, their heavy faces working with a new emotion which was fast rising to the point where expression of some kind was inevitable. Margaret saw both the danger and the hope. She stood by one of the great pillars, gazing down on them, her face paling a little, her calm and steady look melting slowly to one of utter compassion, when suddenly from the squalid group there soared a voice, as high and clear as though it sprang from the throat of a seraph at heaven's gate. The first note cut the tension like a sword. A great gasp went through the crowd, and a thousand voices caught up the song, until the wild melody

rolled out on the darkening air, freighted with the inarticulate longings of a race.

Verse after verse the song rose and swelled. The crowd began to sway and shift. Here and there, imperceptibly at first, one and another turned toward the road — the road which led toward home. Margaret's eyes were still on the women, and even as they moved away they turned to look back at the quiet kindness of her face. They moved together toward the avenue, singing as they went, and the men swung into place behind them, following slowly but steadily, until at last their voices died on the still evening air.

As the throng poured down the avenue, Margaret turned to the gaping Bolles.

"My son and Mr. Carleton will soon be here," she said; "for the sake of your own safety, do not meet them."

Before he could answer she had stepped past him once again, and the great door closed behind her.

XIX

Once more Margaret and Bess were in the sitting room. The shades were closely drawn and the lights within were bright. It was time for Dick and Bruce to come, and though neither of them would hint it to the other, they were both afraid that Bolles had laid some ambush for them, and that they were even now in mortal danger. They themselves were far from feeling the security they affected, each for the other's sake; their nerves were more than shaken, and it was difficult not to start at the sound of a dead leaf blown sharply across the porch.

"We won't say a word about it until they've had their dinner in peace," said Bess.

"It will be better not to speak of it until morning," said her mother; "I can't trust those boys out to-night."

"Yes," assented Bess, "that will be much better."

Out in the kitchen conversation ran riot. Parralee and the maids were so absorbed in rehearsing the tale of their own emotions, all three speaking at once and in utter disregard of the rest, that Jordan found himself without the

audience which his dignity required. He conceived the happy idea of breaking the news to the two young men on their arrival, and for that purpose slipped out at the door and went round the house, trembling at every sound. He waited on the front steps until he heard the long double whistle at the big gate with which both Dick and Bruce always announced their arrival after dark; then he ran down the avenue. Within the house Margaret and Bess sprang up and sat down again, trying to look as natural as possible.

Meanwhile Jordan met the buggy.

"Fer de Lawd's sake, is dat you, Marse Dick en Marse Bruce?" he panted. "Is you dead?"

"What on earth —" began Bruce, but Jordan interrupted him.

"Lawd, Marse Bruce, you dunno w'at's happened," he exclaimed, swelling with importance. "We done had a nigger riot dis evenin', right out yere on Miss Marg'ret's flower-beds, en Miss Marg'ret en Miss Bess —" He stopped, open-mouthed, for Dick had cut the horse sharply, and was already almost at the house. He turned and followed sadly.

The two men sprang out and rushed up the steps. Margaret and Bess rose in astonishment as they burst white-faced into the room. For a moment no one spoke; the reaction of relief was too great for them, and the women were too amazed at the terror upon their faces.

"Thank God!" said Dick, fervently. He leaned on the table, breathing heavily.

"What did that fool Jordan mean about a riot?" demanded Bruce, speaking angrily in his excitement. "What has happened?"

"Jordan!" exclaimed Margaret. "Where did you see him?"

"He met us down by the gate and said there had been a negro riot here on the lawn," said Bruce. "Good God!" he gasped brokenly, dropping into a chair.

"I call it a one-white-man riot, myself," said Bess, indignantly. "Oh, if you two could have seen my mother! I feel seven feet high whenever I think about it! Diccon, you missed it, and you never will know how perfectly grand mother can be!"

"What was it?" demanded both of them, turning to Margaret.

Margaret told the story just as it occurred, while Bess spiced the tale with interpolations of her own. She was in high spirits now that the men were at home, and seized upon whatever aspect of the situation could be twisted into a joke. For once Bruce and Dick paid little heed to her. They sat listening to Margaret, asking few questions and making no comments, their faces setting in rigid lines. When she finished they both rose.

"You must stay here until I can bring Ebeneezer to protect the house," said Dick, as if the

further programme were already arranged. "June is at home, and I'll get the whole family. Are there any men at the quarters to be trusted?"

"Some. I'll send Jordan down to Jim while you're gone; he'll get them together and bring them up."

"You'd better telephone several of the fellows in the village to meet us just outside of town," said Dick, pausing a moment in the hall. "I wouldn't call anybody who lives in the country; they may be needed to protect their own homes. There's no telling what the scoundrel will do."

The two women listened to this rapid conversation with paling faces. "Dick," said his mother, "what do you intend to do?"

"To put Bolles where he can't insult my mother and sister," said Dick, grimly.

"But, my son," she began, and stopped, half choked. "You can't intend any violence," she implored.

"I'll not do anything to make you ashamed of me, mother," he answered; "don't be afraid of that."

Margaret's eyes shone, but her face was still anxious. "But what will you do, dear? And suppose the others —"

"The others will do as I say, or they'll go home," said Dick, briefly. "The only reason I want them is because Bolles may still be in that crowd of negroes, and if he is it will take several of us if we're to get him off without a fight. I'm

going to run him out of town; and if he ever shows his face here again, I'll —"

"No, by heaven, I'll do it!" cried Bruce. "I'll stand by you to-night, Dick, but if ever he dares to come back, he's my meat!"

"He'll never come, so we won't dispute about it," said Dick, already at the back hall door. He went to the barn, mounted his horse bare-backed, and galloped off across the fields. In the shortest possible time he was back with Ebeneezer's entire family — himself, his wife, and the three sons. They were armed with an old horse-pistol, a relic of "ole Marse Dick Davison's" army days, a shot-gun, and an old-fashioned rifle. Jim's cohorts were already in the kitchen.

Bess was now in the wildest spirits. "Oh, I wish I were a man!" she cried. "Diccon, dear, won't you lend me some old clothes and take me with you? I'll keep in the dark, and I won't open my mouth; nobody'll know; please."

Ebeneezer grinned admiringly.

"I think you'd better stay here and protect mother," said Dick, smiling. "Uncle Eb will need you. If they should come back, Uncle Eb, you'll have to fasten her up somewhere; she'd charge the whole outfit with a hat-pin as soon as not."

"If she charge 'em, she shore rout 'em, Marse Dick," chuckled Ebeneezer; "ever since Miss Bess was knee-high to a duck, whatever she set out to do she do."

Bess swept him a courtesy. "Thank you, Uncle Eb!" she exclaimed. "Go along, Diccon; if you're going to be horrid and selfish and keep all your fun to yourself, just let Uncle Eb and me alone; we can paddle our own canoe."

After a few final directions the two men went out, and Bess ran upstairs to bring Viry down to the sitting room.

"You can't stay up there in the dark all by yourself," she protested; "it's no time for anybody to play owl! We'll make Parralee cook a feast for the darkies, and we'll pop corn and roast chestnuts and tell ghost stories in the sitting room, as if we were children again."

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Viry.

"Afraid of what, I'd like to know?"

"Of something happening to Mr. Dick or Mr. Bruce?"

"Nonsense, Viry! Why, I'm ashamed of you! If mother could scat that whole crowd, do you think Dick and Bruce can't manage one white coward? Come along."

She kept the whole household in stir and laughter, determined to give her mother as little time to think as possible, though when at last the long double whistle sounded at the gate again the strain was beginning to tell on her, and she was as thankful as Margaret herself that the trying time was over.

Dick and Bruce, meanwhile, had galloped on with few words. They arranged their plan of

action as briefly as possible, and then rode on in silence. Half a mile from the village a band of six or eight horsemen moved softly out of the shadows. Bruce had purposely told them as little as possible, requesting them to be at this appointed place, armed, and on urgent business, adding to one or two the further request that before coming they should learn the whereabouts of Hiram Bolles. These now reported him in his own bar-room, as he was usually at that hour. There were a great many negroes about, but nothing unusual seemed to be on foot: what was the matter?

Dick told them briefly.

"It won't take long to settle him," said one of the younger men; "did you bring a rope?"

"I don't want a rope. There's to be no lynching, nor talk of one."

"What in thunder did you call us out for, then?"

"I'm going to put him on the night train for Nashville or Birmingham, as he prefers. I shall tell him if he ever shows his face here again he'll be shot on sight, like a mad dog. I asked you fellows because I thought if there were many negroes it would save trouble to have a crowd; but Carleton and I will attend to Bolles. Half of you guard the entrance of his saloon and the other half the rear: we'll go in and get him."

"Well, if he'd been to my house like that—" began the same indignant voice.

"Oh, dry up, Billy," said another. "Lawton's exactly right. If you don't like it, you can go home. Sail ahead, Dick; we're with you."

The little party moved on and went straight to the saloon. A group of negroes who filled the sidewalk stared open-mouthed as the cavalcade drew up, and then vanished in the darkness. The men mounted guard at the two doors while Dick and Bruce entered the saloon. Bolles was behind the counter, his back turned toward them. The room was filled with negroes. Dick sprang up on a chair, rapping the butt of his whip sharply against the stovepipe which ran over his head. Silence fell instantly. Bolles turned, a yellowish pallor overspreading his face. His hand went to his hip pocket.

"Drop that!" said Bruce, covering him with his pistol. "Hands up!" Bolles held them up.

"You men get out and go home," Dick was saying. "You'll find armed men at both doors, but if you go quietly, they won't hurt you."

The room was empty before he finished speaking. He turned to Bolles.

"Come out here in the middle of the room," he commanded. Bolles came, and Dick searched him, taking from him a pistol and a knife.

"Now put your hands down, and hear what you're going to do. You will take the through train to-night at Fulton, north or south, as you prefer. You can write back for Martin, or some of your friends, to wind up your affairs for you

here, for if you come back to do it yourself you'll be a dead man inside of an hour after." He cocked his pistol and covered the trembling man.

"Bruce," he went on, "get the money out of the till for him. — If you want anything out of your safe, tell Mr. Carleton how to open it and he'll get it for you."

Bolles gave him the combination, and pocketed the safe's contents with evident relief. He was sure now that he was not to be killed, and he began to bluster a little.

"I'll have the law on you for this outrage," he began. Bruce gave him a look which set his teeth chattering.

"You open your head again and I'll knock it off," he said fiercely. "And whatever villany you take up next time, I'd advise you to try something different from setting negroes on to insult women. Some of the crowd outside are itching to lynch you now, and you may not be lucky enough next time to have Mr. Lawton along to protect you."

Bolles gave Dick a sudden look of gratitude which was by no means to that gentleman's taste. "March!" he said briefly.

"Can't I go upstairs an' get some clothes?" he whined.

Bruce frowned impatiently, but Dick assented.

"Wait till I go up and light the gas then," said Bruce. "Bring him along!" he called in a moment. "Five minutes now, and no more."

Bolles gathered a few necessities in shaking haste, and the two escorted him down the stairs and out on the street, where they held a short consultation.

"You'd better go home, Dick," said Bruce; "Aunt Margaret has been through with too much already, and she'll be miserable till somebody comes back. Morton will help me take Bolles to Fulton; we won't need any one else."

"If we can get a horse —" began Dick.

"It won't hurt Mr. Bolles to walk," said Bruce, calmly. "Some of you fellows get a rope. Nobody's going to hurt you, you coward," he went on, feeling the man shake under his grip.

The rope was procured and Bolles taken back into the saloon, where his legs were so fastened that running would be impossible, his arms bound to his sides, and an end of rope left on either side long enough for his two captors to hold. His valise, a small one, was strapped to his back, and the three set out at a slow pace for Fulton, while the rest of the party scattered to their homes.

At the station Mr. Bolles elected to board the north-bound train, which would be the first to arrive; but finding that it was delayed by a wreck he hastily reversed his decision and bought a ticket south. Bruce and Morton guarded him in a grim silence which was almost more than his coward nerves could bear. They had taken the ropes off at the station, leaving them on the

platform where they fell; and every time Bruce's eye or Morton's wandered toward the door he felt a noose about his neck. When the train whistled at last his face was ashen and old, and he trembled as he walked. The two men rose without a word and walked on either side of him to the steps of the car. As he reached the platform he turned upon them a look of malignant rage. Bruce lifted his pistol thoughtfully, holding it in plain sight until the train carried him beyond their view.

"It's surely rough on Alabama, Morton," he said, as they returned to their horses, "but I think the air of old Jeness will be considerably improved. Now for a quick gallop back, old man; I'm in a hurry to get home and go foraging, for I haven't had a bite since noon."

XX

"So you're a convert to the plan of making the negroes vote against Martin, Dick," said Bruce at luncheon the day before the election.

"They sha'n't vote for that gang and work in these mines," said Dick.

"Exactly. Well, suppose you come down to the office this afternoon and tell them so yourself. I'll be there, but they may as well get it straight from you."

"All right; I'll be on hand."

The big bell was rung half an hour before the usual time for quitting work, and the men gathered at the signal, wondering what was the matter, and surprised to see Dick as well as Bruce on the office porch. When the last gang had arrived Dick stepped forward.

"We've been talking over this election long enough for every one to have made up his mind," he said; "and I want to know how you will vote. I want every man who intends to vote against Martin's plan of opening saloons in the county to go to the other end of the porch."

A number of men stepped out at once, and he counted them as they went — fifty-seven in all. He knew that most of them had been decided

by an appeal to the religious aspects of the liquor question, and that it was largely a matter of emotion with them rather than of civic principle; nevertheless he was well pleased.

"That's a bit ahead of the eleven fellows who rattled around in the wagon last year," he said, smiling. "If we keep on hammering, and live long enough, some day it will be the little crowd at this end of the porch, and the big one over yonder where the fifty-seven are. Anyway, we'll try it."

Appreciative chuckles came from the fifty-seven, while in the larger group were embarrassed grins and much shuffling of feet. Dick turned squarely to them, a gleam in his gray eyes.

"Now, you men who want to vote for lawlessness and disorder, for the kind of men who risked all riot and shamefulness right here on this place two days ago, listen to me. Martin opened this liquor question to tighten his hold on you negroes. He has stopped skinning you because Mr. Carleton has frightened him off; but you know what he did till he was stopped, and that to this day he fleeces every negro he dares to lay his hands on; and yet you want to give him added power. I have nothing to say against it. This is a free country, where a man may make a fool or a coward of himself if he chooses. But for my part, I shall do what I can to protect my mother and sister, and every one else in

the county, from Martin's misrule. You must choose between him and me, for I'll give no support to anybody who upholds him. Those of you who intend to vote for liquor can get your pay to-morrow morning before you go to the polls; and you must be off this place with all your belongings before sundown to-morrow night. If any of you are here after dark you will be arrested for trespass. I will close these mines forever and a day before they shall harbor men who support outrage and corruption and theft. At six o'clock the wagons will be here as they were last year, and I will call the roll and see who goes in them. No one who does not go will be molested; but it will be understood that they expect to vote for Martin, and they are to be off this place for good and all by sundown. Think it over and decide. That's all I have to say. Come, Bruce."

The two turned and walked away, leaving behind them a dead silence in which the men looked at one another in dismay. Those in the smaller group walked back to their fellows and broke into chaffing or remonstrant speech.

"Whar you gwine move ter, say?" — "Who gwine give yer two dollars er day, Sam Po'ter?" — "Lawd, Mose, yo' ole 'ooman'll lay it in fer you, sho'! She know she ain' gwine find ary 'nother Miss Marg'ret." — "Is de sheriff gwine ter open er mine en give you all wages like you gits yere?" — "De camps is layin' off men stidder

takin' 'em on, en winter en de rains e'en-erbout comin': whar you gwine?"

"Ole 'ooman en de chilluns kin sleep in de bresh termorrer night," said one wit; "hit ain't much cole yit, en dar's a new moon. Hit's reel purty outdo's."

A general laugh followed this sally, and the men began to move away, breaking into smaller groups as they neared the quarters. Arrived there, the women-folk took the matter in hand, and Mose was not the only head of a household who heard the riot act read that night. In the morning the wagons were waiting, and also the men to fill them. With the exception of Simmons, the white men, too, were on hand, though their presence was not required. Dick went with them to the polls, and saw that the last ballot was properly cast. About noon he telephoned Hayne.

"How many votes did you get by moral suasion, old man?"

"Thirty," said Hayne, rather ruefully.

Dick laughed. "You wouldn't have done so well if it had been a purely political election," he said; "but it's not so bad after all, and next year we'll pick flint and try again."

"How did you come out yourself?" asked Hayne.

"Oh, we got them all, of course; but it won't do any good. Martin will sweep the county."

And so indeed it proved. The white vote was

solidly against him, as well as the respectable negro vote; but both together were far from being a match for the negro voters in the camps.

Hayne came out to the Lawtons' to dinner the next evening. He arrived early and found that Bess had not yet returned, though it was growing dusk. He sat with Margaret, Dick, and Bruce, talking over the election.

"It is an outrage," he said at last, "that half a dozen white scoundrels should be able to come in here and by buying the votes of these strange negroes, most of them unable to read or write, be able to wrench the government from the people who belong here, and to wield the power they do. I don't see any remedy but a restriction of the ignorant vote."

"The only chance for next fall is for all the mine-owners to get together and do in every camp what we did here," said Bruce. "We can restrict it all right that way, and see to the other later. The ballot ought to be taken away from every negro who can't read and write."

"Amen!" cried Bess's gay voice in the hall. "But for pity's sake don't stop at that! What I want is a gerrymander that will dispose of the vote of a white patriarch like Mr. Jacob Simmons!"

She came in in her riding-habit, bringing with her, as she always did, a sense of breeze and sunshine. She nodded to Hayne, and dropping into a chair gave a long sigh of satisfaction.

"Oh, mother," she said, "I've had the beautifullest time! Adventures have been happening all the afternoon; and to crown my joy I have seen the desire of my heart accomplished and your precious Mr. Simmons put in the calaboose!"

"Bess!" exclaimed her mother in horror.

"Now, mother, don't look shocked; I didn't take him there myself. And don't you think it's a dreadful place for him, either; I tell you it's an ideal place. The man who invented calabooses must have been a prophet, and had Mr. Simmons in his mind's eye when he did it. And don't worry; nobody's unhappy: the patriarch is too drunk to know what's happened to him, and the children are having the time of their lives; they don't get their pa 'took up' every day — more's the pity!"

"But, Bess —"

"Wait, and I'll tell you. I'll begin at the beginning. I was riding down the road by their house when I heard the most pitiful sobbing in that clump of trees there by the road. Of course I stopped, and there was poor little 'Kiah Simmons shaking and crying down on the ground, and he said his father was up at the house and he was afraid of him. I couldn't get another thing out of the poor mite, so I just went up to see."

A protest against such madness came from her four listeners.

"Oh, I had my pistol. Mother always makes me take it when I go alone. Besides, do you suppose I'd leave them there to be murdered while I went screaming for help? I just went in!"

"Alone, and that man drinking!" said Margaret, her face quite pale.

"No, ma'am, he wasn't drinking. And he wasn't beating the children, either. He had finished both jobs to perfection, and was taking a hard-earned rest in the middle of the floor, fast asleep and dead drunk."

Bruce opened his mouth to speak, but merely glanced at Margaret and said nothing. Hayne looked both concerned and proud, but his eyes were twinkling.

"The chairs were all broken, and the children were black and blue. Julia Maria had a cut over one eye that she got defending one of the little ones. Mr. Simmons had laid aside his coat, vest, and collar. He had taken off his shoes, too; he wanted them to throw at 'Kiah. There wasn't a bit of fire nor a bite to eat. They said he locked them in yesterday morning when he went off to the election and left them there till he came back this afternoon, drunk as could be, and with a big bottle of whiskey he said the sheriff had given him."

"The sheriff!" exclaimed Dick. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, Diccon, the sheriff. He was just talkative when he came home, and said a lot of things

he'd have kept to himself if he'd been sober. He's been working for the sheriff ever so long. But he kept on drinking until he was dangerous, and then he found he'd lost the money the sheriff had given him, and that made him mad, so he turned in and took it out of the children — the brute!"

Margaret had risen, but Bess pulled her down again.

"Sit down and hear my tale, you impolite lady! I told you the children were having a celebration. I helped them start a fire, and then I rode over to Uncle Eb's. June was there, and he and Aunt Jane and I carried over everything she had in the house to eat. I gave June my pistol and told him to mount guard over the patriarch while I went to town for the sheriff."

"You didn't —" broke in Margaret, Bruce, and Dick.

"No, I didn't," she interrupted; "I didn't anything I oughtn't, so there! I know that's uncommon," she added with a laugh, "but I really didn't. I went to Dr. Ward's office to send him for the sheriff; but he came right into the office while I was there, like a real special providence, and I just gave him one piece of my mind!"

Hayne threw back his head and laughed, and even Bruce smiled.

"I told him next time he wanted to give a man whiskey for buying votes for him he'd

better pick out somebody who had no little children to have their heads cut with the broken bottle — and he said he would, too. Do you know I think I really impressed the sheriff," she added modestly.

"I don't doubt it," said Hayne. Bess flashed him a smile which seemed to Bruce rather uncalled for.

"He had his buggy there, and I made him come right out. I rode along by the buggy and told him all about the little Simmonses. He seemed real sorry for them. I told him he ought to square things up by sending the head Simmons to the penitentiary, but he said he couldn't, just for being drunk — it was against the law. I told him he did everything else against the law, so that didn't make any difference; but the most I could get out of him was a promise to try to get him as heavy a sentence as the law allowed. I don't more than half believe him, either," she added morosely. "But anyway, he took him off to jail. I brought the children some oranges and things, and Aunt Jane had been stuffing them the whole time I was gone besides. I'm really uneasy about 'Kiah; I think he's going to explode."

"I hope this will insure Simmons's discharge, Aunt Margaret," said Bruce. "I wondered why he didn't turn up for work this morning, and this explains it. Do you want him kept any longer?"

"I can't let those children go, Bruce," she said. "Find out first if there's been enough mistreatment to get them away from him legally. After that I suppose he must go." But she looked troubled and disappointed. Bess rose.

"It's time for me to run and dress if I'm to be allowed at dinner," she said. "Now, mother, quit looking Simmons-y; I won't have it. Do cheer mother up, everybody. You might try reforming the sheriff, mother; he's a lot more promising." She ran off upstairs, while Bruce hurried to the office and telephoned Martin to inform Simmons, as soon as he was in a condition to receive the tidings, that his arrest had been caused by Bruce Carleton, and not by Miss Lawton.

It was three weeks before Mr. Simmons was seen again. He spent a large part of that time in jail, but when he was released he did not return home, nor apply for work at the mines, and Bruce hoped that he had deserted his family and run away. He was indulging this hope as he walked back to the house from the wheat-field one evening about dusk. The men had quit work and gone home, while he had lingered a few minutes to decide where the strippers should begin their work in the morning. As he came over the crest of the hill he heard a strange, smothered cry — a woman's cry — from the grove in the valley beyond. He stopped to listen, but it did not come again, and he ran

down the hill into the foot-path and toward the grove. As he neared the trees the cry came again, and presently he saw a woman struggling in the grip of a man whose hand was over her mouth. It was almost dark, and her face was turned from him, but the dreadful conviction seized him that it was Bess. He had already recognized Simmons, and was sure that he had learned the truth about his arrest from the children notwithstanding his caution to them: the brute was trying to get his revenge. He had scarcely time to think these thoughts before he was upon them. Simmons had neither seen nor heard him when a furious blow on the jaw sent him reeling against a tree. His head struck it violently, and he lay motionless where he fell. Bruce turned to the woman, all his resolutions forgotten, his whole soul in his voice.

"Bess, darling!" he cried, catching her in one arm and taking her hands in his. "Oh! Viry!" He loosed her and recoiled as from a snake. "What in thunder are you doing out here so late?" he asked angrily. "This is no country for women to gad about in alone at night."

Viry did not answer him. She had kept some of her pupils in until late that afternoon, and after they were gone she remained in her seat from sheer lack of interest or occupation in life. What was the use of going anywhere or doing anything — what was the use of living? She sat in a dull apathy in the darkening room

until roused at last by a sudden perception of the chill and gloom of the approaching night. Then she had gone out quickly. She was desperately afraid of being out alone in the dark, and had hurried along the path until Simmons had sprung out upon her, and Bruce had heard her cry. She leaned against a tree now, trembling, and weak with fright.

Bruce walked over to Simmons, struck a match, and examined him coolly, stirring him with his foot.

"Pretty good cut on his head," he said. "He's good for half an hour yet, at least, but I won't take any risks. I'll get a rope and tie the devil up and send for the sheriff before he finds out what hit him. I'll take you as far as the barn; you'll be safe then. Walk as fast as you can."

He had already turned and started toward the house, so he did not see Mr. Simmons draw himself carefully to a sitting posture, and then, wiping the blood from his eyes, begin to creep on all fours through the trees.

Viry had moved as Bruce spoke, and walked beside him, panting a little.

"You needn't go so fast," he said; "there's time enough." He slackened his pace.

"It isn't that," said Viry. "I can walk."

It was the memory of Bruce's voice that moved her, and the eagerness of his clasping hands. And yet he was going away, though

Miss Bess loved him. She could not understand, but she wanted to help them both. She was afraid of Bruce, too — afraid of the sound of his voice when he spoke to her, afraid of his anger at her presumption. But for Miss Bess's sake she would dare. Her breath came in gasps.

"Mr. Bruce," she said, and the sound of her voice was lost in the drumming of the blood in her ears, "if you love Miss Bess so much — " she caught her breath and hesitated. Bruce had come to a dead stop.

"This passes bounds," he said under his breath. "Will you be good enough to hold your tongue?"

Viry wavered for a moment; she felt as if she were about to fall, but she steadied herself with a desperate effort and walked on, her face burning, hot tears smarting under her lids. Bruce stalked beside her without speaking until they reached the barn.

"You are safe now," he said. "See that you don't worry Miss Margaret or Miss Bess with any tales."

Viry flashed him an indignant look, but the night was quite dark, and if it had not been he would not have seen it, for his face was turned away.

He hurried into the barn and called the man who was feeding the horses. They took a rope and a lantern and ran back to the grove; but to Bruce's amazement Simmons was gone. They searched the grove and even the neighboring fields, but could find no trace of him; and

finally, fearing that he might be late for dinner and arouse Margaret's anxiety — for she had not yet recovered from her fear of Bolles's return — Bruce gave up the search for the night.

"Don't say a word to anybody," he charged the negro. "I'll go to town early in the morning and be sworn in as a constable myself; then I'll search this county till I bring that fellow down. Nobody can be safe till he's caught."

He started next morning soon after breakfast, was duly sworn in, and hurried back. There were several things to be looked after before he could start on his hunt. Dick was away. He intended to take with him two of the foremen, both unmarried men — Jones, a white man, and Jim Mason. He finished his hurried rounds, after his return, at the kiln which Jim's men were building far down on the plantation near the gate which led from the private road through Margaret's land to the county pike outside. After giving his directions to the men, he called Jim aside and told him what he wanted. The man was more than willing to accompany him, and the two walked back along the road toward the office, where Jones awaited them.

The road dipped down into a little hollow through which ran a brook, spanned by a wooden bridge and shaded by an ancient beech. As they stepped upon the bridge a man on horseback suddenly emerged from behind the tree on the other side of the stream, and fired twice at

Bruce's heart. He dropped without a groan, and Jim fell upon his knees beside him, while Simmons, shouldering his smoking rifle, turned coolly back up the plantation road.

Margaret and Bess had started to town for some shopping, and were driving along through the fields at a brisk trot, laughing together over some of the girl's nonsense, when a man on horseback appeared around a bend of the road, two or three hundred yards from the bridge.

"Why, there's Mr. Simmons," said Margaret. "I thought he had gone away."

"He evidently prefers hunting to work," said Bess, seeing his gun over his shoulder; "somebody has been shooting partridges on the place ever since I woke up this morning, and I just expect it was he. I wish Dick would arrest him for it when he comes home."

Mr. Simmons reined in his horse, touching his cap awkwardly.

"Mornin', ladies," he said politely. "Is this yere a gentle horse?"

"Why, yes," said Margaret in surprise. "Why do you ask?"

"Thar's a feller shot a man around yere not long ago. He's a-layin' down the road a piece. I 'lowed ef your horse is anyways scary he mout shy. You-all better turn back."

"Is he dead?" asked Margaret, in a shocked voice.

Mr. Simmons reflected.

"I reckon he mus' be. Yes, he's e'en about dead by now."

"Who shot him?"

The man's eyes deliberately swept the horizon and came back with speculation in their depths.

"Why — somebody shot him," he ventured; "must 'a' done it; he's a-layin' thar. He —"

Bess had cut the horse suddenly and the animal bounded past him. He looked after them with a slow grin.

"Even all round, Miss Proudface. An' ef he had a chanst, I reckon I kep' you talkin' long enough to settle it; every second 'll count with 'im. I'm willin' now to call it quits."

He rode on a little way farther, and then, turning sharply out of the road, went across the fields for over a mile to a line of thickly wooded hills.

XXI

MARGARET, looking at Bess's white face, herself guessed the truth before they reached the wounded man. They found Jim kneeling beside him, crying like a child, and trying to stop the flow of blood with strips torn from his own shirt. The two women sprang out without a word and bent over the prostrate body. Margaret laid her ear to his heart, and Bess loosened his collar, watching her mother in an agony of fear.

"It beats," said Margaret. "Go to the cross-roads store and telephone for Dr. Ward. And remember while he breathes there is hope."

Bess was already in the buggy, and Margaret, with Jim's assistance, began to bind the wound as best she could. She folded her jacket and slipped it under his head, and then sat beside him, feeling his fluttering pulse.

"Go home and get some brandy, a wagon, a mattress, blankets, and men to lift him," she said to Jim. "That is all we can do till the doctor comes. Tell no one whom you do not need to tell; and outrun death if you can."

Jim sprang to his feet and ran. Margaret sat waiting, her eyes on Bruce's face. The habitual

sternness of his expression was all gone, smoothed out by the hand of approaching death, and in its place was a look so worn and sad that, selfish as she felt his suffering to be, her heart ached as she saw it. She had not realized how great his struggle had been, nor how severely it had told on him; his face was actually gaunt, and the lines about his mouth told their own story of pride and silence and pain. She thought of Bess, and of herself long years ago when Philip, her first Philip, had been snatched from her in the twinkling of an eye, until her own anguish and her daughter's seemed to blend and fill the world.

Bess meanwhile had dashed down the road and out along the pike to the cross-roads store, which drove a thriving trade in groceries and dry-goods with the negroes of the neighboring camps. As she reined in her horse she saw, to her infinite relief, the figure of Johnson Tyree in the doorway and his buggy at the hitching-post. She sprang to the porch, calling him as she did so.

"Johnson, Mr. Carleton has been shot. He is in the road beyond our gate, by the bridge. — Have you any brandy here?" she asked the store-keeper.

"I have some whiskey," he replied, producing a flask.

She gave it to Tyree, and seizing a bolt of muslin lying on the counter with a pair of scis-

sors upon it, tore off a long strip. "Take this for bandages," she said. "Fly. I left the gate open. Mother is there, and Dr. Ward will come."

Tyree went out, and the store-keeper began to ask excited questions. She seized the telephone receiver without hearing him, and rang up Dr. Ward.

"Oh, hurry," she implored as she finished her story. "I think he is dying. Tell your father to come, but do not wait for him; drive fast."

She hung up the receiver and ran hastily through the book, looking for another number, a look of relentless fury growing in her eyes.

"Is that Mr. Martin?" she demanded. Then, "Tell Mr. Martin Miss Lawton wants him at once. — Mr. Martin? — Jacob Simmons shot Mr. Carleton twenty minutes ago — murdered him, I think. He has gone up our plantation road, I suppose to his own house, or to those thick woods on the hill. Have you bloodhounds? — You haven't? Will you arrest him at once? — You promise to go yourself? — Thank you." She hurried back to the buggy, and in another moment was driving furiously toward the man she loved, an agonized longing in her heart to see his living face once more.

Tyree had already reached him. He had driven with one hand, holding the cloth in his teeth and tearing it with the other hand as he went. He bent over Bruce, feeling his heart and

forcing the whiskey between his teeth. Then he bound the wound more securely, cutting away his clothing in order to do so.

"He was shot twice," he said to Margaret, "and this bullet would have killed him instantly if it had not been stopped."

He showed her a cut place in the vest, and from an inner pocket drew out and handed to her an oval metal case. She recognized it as one Bess had given him with her picture in it while she yet wore curls and short skirts. She slipped it into the bag on her wrist.

"Will the other one kill him?" she asked.

"I don't know, Miss Margaret; I can't tell where the ball is. But he has clean blood and a good constitution; we can certainly hope. Who did it?"

"Jacob Simmons did it," she answered, rising as she saw Bess returning, and hurrying to give her a word of encouragement. At the same moment Jim drove up from the opposite direction, bringing the needed supplies. They lifted him carefully to the mattress, and then into the wagon. He was still unconscious, but his head turned a little, and he moaned in pain. The wagon moved slowly down the road, Tyree sitting beside him and the men walking behind. Bess and Margaret drove on rapidly to prepare a room for him on the first floor.

Dr. Ward overtook the wagon before it reached the house, and when the men had laid their

unconscious burden down in the sewing-room he turned to Margaret, who stood beside the bed.

"You won't be needed, Margaret," he said, gently, to his old playmate. "Tyree will stay and help me. Send father in when he comes, and I'll bring you word as soon as I know myself."

Margaret went back to the sitting room, where Bess stood by the window, erect and tearless.

"They will tell us as soon as they know," she said, in answer to her daughter's look. Bess turned back to the window.

"If Dick were here," she said passionately, "that man would be caught! Or if I were only a man myself! But who can trust the sheriff?"

"I would rather he should get away, dear, than run the risk of losing Dick too," said her mother; "if he were here he ought to go, and he would go — and I could not bear it!"

Bess took her hand. "Forgive me, mother," she said; "I didn't think."

They waited together for what seemed an age. Old Dr. Ward came, and the room which held the mystery of life or death swallowed him up, and again they waited in the outer silence. To Bess it seemed that the day must be almost ended when at last the door opened and the father and son came out. The older man answered the look in the women's faces.

"We will make a fight for it," he said, "and with patience and courage we may win. David, here, is going to telephone up to Nashville for a

couple of nurses, and until they come Tyree and I will take it turn about. David has two or three cases of fever on hand and must go back and forth; but I'm an old man on the retired list, my dear, and if you like I can stay in the house until he is out of danger. Now, do I need any thanks? Bruce is almost as much like my grandchild as little pale-face, here. He wasn't born to be killed by that rascal, child. His life has been saved twice already — once by the picture that turned the worst bullet, and once by Tyree's getting there in time to stop his bleeding to death and to give him the whiskey. Your mother knows more than most women, but that wound was more than she could manage."

"What picture?" asked Bess.

"I don't know that it was a picture," said the old man, glad to occupy her mind with any trifle; "Tyree said there was an old metal case in his vest pocket that looked as if it might have a picture in it. It ought to have held his sweetheart's, for it was right over his heart; though from what Tyree said it was rather a shabby-looking affair, too, for a sweetheart's picture."

"Where is it?" asked Bess. The color had come and gone in her face.

"I have it," said Margaret. She opened her hand-bag, lying on the table, and drew it out. "See, there is where the bullet dented it. Nobody has opened it," she added, carelessly, "so the possible sweetheart is safe from dis-

covery. Go put it away in his room, dear, where he can get it when he wants it."

Bess gave her mother a quick, grateful look and went out. Dr. David was in the hall calling up "Long Distance." She ran past him up the steps, not to Bruce's room, but to her own. She pressed the dented old case to her lips. She had bought it one summer long ago when she and Dick were children. Their mother had taken them on their first trip North, and one afternoon they had gone to Coney Island, and in one of the endless booths had had some tintypes taken and framed in the cases which the photographer had on sale. She had come across hers of Dick only the other day, and laughed over it. She had had two of her own framed, one for Dick and one for Bruce, which, on reaching home she had presented to him in the firm conviction that the case, with all that gilding on it, was a very splendid present indeed. And now it had saved his life! And he must love her as she loved him, or he would not have worn it so. Unconsciously her hand went up to her own locket, lying hidden beneath her dress.

She had been sure of his love so long as she was indifferent to it; but ever since the night when she had started to walk across the fields with him she had believed in it and doubted it by turns; and of late, especially since that dreadful night when Dick told her he was going away, she had doubted it altogether. But if he wore

her picture — ah, *if* he wore it! Suppose her picture were not there? He might have taken it out years ago and put some one else's in its place — oh, not in that shabby old thing! — But he might have put some papers in there — something he really didn't care about at all. Mere improbability could not balk her woman's power of self-torment; she knew now that her picture was not in the case, and in her sudden shame of the happiness which she had felt a moment before, she dropped it on her dressing-table and covered her face with her hands. The picture fell on the back of a brush, glanced off on its edge, and fell rattling to the floor as its rickety old clasp parted and it sprawled wide open to rebuke her lack of faith.

Not that she intended to look at it even then. She had now decided that it contained the picture of the girl — not herself — to whom Bruce had given his heart. Not for worlds would she spy upon him. She bent on one knee, her head resolutely turned away, and groped behind her for the case. When her fingers touched it they told her that it was empty. In her astonishment she turned her head, and there on the floor lay the queer old tintype; and beside it, cut to the same size, a later picture taken at college in her cap and gown gazed up at her reproachfully. She caught them up, laughing hysterically, and then, flinging her arms across a chair, buried her head in them and cried to her heart's content.

The sheriff meanwhile had been in a quandary. He liked Bruce Carleton, notwithstanding the young man's attitude toward him, and he had no objection whatever to having Jacob Simmons hung, provided he himself did not have to assist at the ceremony. But Simmons had been working for him for some time; he had done several very dirty jobs; and he was of that unpleasantly vindictive nature which would enjoy any measure of retaliation on his captor whether it softened his own fate or not. The sheriff could scarcely afford to have him caught in that county on a really serious charge. The fellow was fighting mad already, about being locked up as "drunk and disorderly"; he mustn't be jailed again. After all, Miss Lawton had told him very little. Carleton evidently wasn't dead, though she seemed to be trying to make the worst of it; and how did she know it was Simmons? He did some rapid thinking which convinced him that he must attend to the matter himself; he wanted no more witnesses. He provided himself with a razor, a small roll of bills, and two or three packages of food, which he thrust into his overcoat pockets; and making a rapid circuit of the Lawton place he rode by an unobserved route to the hills of which Bess had told him, having wisely assumed that so much of her information as served his purpose was correct.

He had already, for quite different purposes, arranged a code of signals with the man he

sought, and had no difficulty in finding him. It took but a few moments to transfer the money and food from the sheriff's pocket to that of Mr. Simmons, and to remove the latter gentleman's bushy beard.

"Where'd you get this horse?" asked Martin.

"Picked him up on the Lawton place last night."

"Well, you get on him and go. I'm askin' no questions, an' I don't want any information. I'm goin' down to the Lawton place to get a posse an' hunt these hills fer a feller that's been doin' some shootin'. Then I'm goin' to his house, an' beat around the neighborhood generally." He glanced at his watch. "Anybody that was spry enough could get the morning train to — somewheres, over at the junction, if they kep' due west and off the pike where folks could see 'em." He turned his horse's head and rode off.

As soon as he struck the road he put his horse to a gallop again, so that when he arrived at Mrs. Lawton's any one could see that the animal was in a lather. He assured Margaret that he had been "on the move" ever since her daughter telephoned, and that he had already picked up one or two clews on his way out. He asked and obtained permission to raise a posse on the place. The woods were scoured, the man's house watched, the whole plantation, and indeed that part of the county, thoroughly searched. Telegrams were sent that afternoon to all the neigh-

boring railroad stations, and Dick, who arrived the next night, thought that for once the sheriff had done his duty like a man. He offered a large reward for Mr. Simmons; but to this day he has never been heard of; and in his absence his fortunate family thrives and rejoices.

The long days when Bruce's life hung in the balance were easier for Bess to bear than for Viry. Every one knew that Bruce was a second brother to Bess, and whatever signs of grief were visible in her seemed entirely natural; moreover, nothing could rob her of the certainty, all the more blessed for the long doubt, that Bruce's heart was hers. She could not understand his silence, his usual manner toward her, nor, above all, his intention to leave her, apparently without any attempt to change their relations. But it was not necessary to understand; whatever he did, there was some good reason for it, and that he loved her was enough; she could wait for all the rest. Whether he lived or died, he loved her, and in that knowledge was strength to face whatever the future might have in store.

But Viry could show no trace of grief, nor did she dare inquire too eagerly if the man she loved were yet alive. Her own consciousness of her love made her timid even where she would not have been suspected, while from Margaret's presence she shrank as burnt flesh might shrink from red-hot iron. She not only lived without the comfort of knowing that he loved

her; she was every moment conscious of the scorn and anger of the last words she had heard him speak; and she felt, too, that it was she who had sent him to his death. She had long lived without hope of happiness; but now she felt that her life had become a curse, not merely to herself, but to the only two people whom she had found it possible to love. She watched Bess's face in anguish, seeing it grow thin and pale and sad, yet never daring to speak of that of which her heart was full, lest at the touch of the girl's sweet sympathy her pent-up feeling should rush out, and she should say too much. Bess thought her cold and unfeeling; and then, fair-minded friend that she was always, remembered Bruce's long dislike of her and owned that it was unreasonable to expect Viry to be really grieved.

For herself, as the week-like days grew into month-long weeks, Bess found that the knowledge of Bruce's love for her could not always steady her in the face of his impending death. She knew without words that somehow, without words also, her mother understood, and for her mother's sake as well as for her own pride she kept up an appearance of cheerfulness in her presence; but there came times when such effort was beyond her. She waited in the sitting room one morning while the doctors lingered by Bruce's bed, and the look of their faces as they came out was as much as her composure could bear. As

they began to speak to her mother she raised the window by which she stood, closing it behind her quickly lest she should hear what they were saying. She ran down the steps and across the yard, her hands pressed tight to her ears, her feet stumbling as she went. She went to the old spring-house beech, where she and her mother had carried so many of their sorrows and joys, and threw herself face down upon the grass, her head on her arm. Great sobs began to shake her body, deep, tearless, long-drawn. Tears followed them, slow and few at first, and then in a wild rush that eased the desperate tension of her heart. She rose quite calm at last and started back to the house ready to take up her life again and bear it bravely.

Walter Hayne had ridden out, as he did every day, to inquire, to find some service which he could render to Margaret or to Dick, and to watch in aching sorrow the change in Bess. He had not given up his own hopes, since he felt sure that Dick's illness would have wrought like havoc in her face; but the whole force of his love had poured itself into a longing to help and comfort her. To-day as he dismounted he saw her approaching through the side gate, and hurried impulsively to meet her, not knowing what he should do or say, but moved deeply, as he came nearer, by the look upon her face.

"He is no better?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I would give my life for his if it would help you," he said. "It seems such a poor thing to say when I cannot do it; but I love you so that I cannot bear your sorrow without trying to tell you how much I care, how much I want to help. Dear, is there nothing love can do?"

The tears welled up in her eyes, though they did not fall.

"Understand that I am asking nothing for myself," he said gently. "If you care for me ever so little, if you think you can ever care, I do not ask to know it. I only want you to know that I love you with my whole heart and soul and life, so that if by a miracle that knowledge could give you a moment's comfort, or if it would help you to turn to me for anything I might do —" his voice trembled and ceased.

"Mr. Hayne," said Bess, turning her tear-filled eyes to his, "I think you are the best man I ever knew. Bruce would not love me like that; he would never say to me what you have said; and yet — it is Bruce that I love." Her voice sank to a whisper. Two tears brimmed over and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Hayne lifted her hand and kissed it. His face was pale, but his eyes were steady and clear.

"You are the sweetest woman God ever made," he said. "You will bless me all my life, as you have blessed me from the first day we met. And as long as I live I shall live for you — and

for Carleton, and every one you love. Never give me troubled thoughts, dear; be glad, when you think of me, that you have made my life so rich."

He held her hand still, and now he took them both, holding them fast for a moment. "Carleton will get well," he said; "he will not die; and your love will make him like one of the archangels. Sweet, do not grieve; it is life that will come, not death."

She turned her face toward him, half comforted by the strong assurance in his voice. He smiled at her and once more lifted her hands to his lips. Then he turned and left her to mount his horse and ride on his solitary way.

XXII

To Bess it seemed that Hayne's confident faith in Bruce's recovery had in some way laid hold upon him and dragged him back from the gates of death. That very day the fire of life, sunk as it was to a half-quenched spark, began to glow again, and slowly, fitfully, flickered up into an ever-steadying flame. One week and another passed in slowly brightening hope. Christmas came and went in unwonted quiet, though not in gloom; and by the middle of January they began to lift Bruce into a great arm-chair beside his bed, where cushioned in pillows and wrapped in blankets he sat for a while each day, trying to regain a little of his vanished strength. The time came at last when he wrung from the doctor a set promise that he might go into the next room in two or three days. In his own mind he was determined that it should be two, not three. He had heard practically nothing of Bess in the ages he had spent within these walls, and as his physical strength came back his patience, never very robust, fainted and failed him altogether.

Hayne had ridden over that afternoon and

Margaret had kept him to dinner. She was out of the room just now, and he sat with Bess and Dick before the fireplace filled with blazing logs. They spoke of Bruce, and of the doctor's promise.

"He's doing well to get into the sitting room before January is out," said Dick; "Labrador won't see him this winter; I doubt if he makes it before the end of the spring."

"Labrador!" exclaimed Hayne in amazement. "Is he still going to Labrador?"

"Certainly," said Dick. "You didn't think a trifle like being half murdered would stop him, did you?"

"When will he be back?" asked Hayne, still in bewilderment.

"Oh, nobody knows. Years perhaps, he says."

Hayne looked at Bess, and as he saw the burning crimson of her cheeks could have bitten his tongue out to recall his words.

"I can't understand what makes Bruce so foolish," Dick went on. "There's all the fortune he needs right here if he'd just be content to stay here and make it."

"Oh, he has good reason for what he does," said Hayne, carelessly. "Carleton's a very level-headed fellow; his judgment's worth trusting, I think.— Miss Bess, I want to go partridge hunting to-morrow if the weather holds; may I borrow your dog? Mr. Carleton lent him to me last winter while you were away; if he does

half as well as he did then I'll have a bag of game for you when I come back."

Bess assented, and the conversation rambled on. Hayne never could remember how the rest of the evening was spent. He left as soon as he could, and passed a most wretched night. It had never occurred to him that Bruce would go away for any reason except that Bess did not care for him; he had supposed either that he feared to speak, or that he had spoken and been refused; and since the day when Bess had told him of her love for Bruce he had taken it as a matter of course that everything was settled between them. The perception that out of her desire to spare him further uncertainty and disappointment she had said to him what she had not said to the man she loved — what she had not, he now guessed, even been asked to say — only deepened his love and reverence for her. But what of Carleton? The man loved her passionately, consumingly. He himself loved her too much not to understand the look he had surprised on Bruce's face that night. Why then was he going away? Why, above all, was he going without a word?

He sat puzzling over it far into the night, until, spurred by his love, his mind grasped the truth. He remembered Carleton's eagerness for wealth; yet neither Mrs. Lawton, he knew, nor Dick, would find fault with any man on the score of poverty. It was the man's own pride

which had put up the bars — his infernal, selfish pride! He rose and walked the floor. Bess loved him — she would love him all her life — and the stiff-necked fool was going to the world's end and leaving her without a word! For a time his anger swept everything before it. Why should such a doom have overtaken her — to give a love like hers to a man like that? He raged against her fate and his own. Then he turned from the thought of his own suffering to work out some plan which should prevent hers. But he could think of nothing which would serve. Carleton had always met him in an outwardly friendly fashion, yet with an unmistakable reserve of antagonism; and though he spent his days and nights in the effort he could find no way in his own thoughts by which to approach him, to prevent the mad journey he had himself encouraged, or to smooth his way to Bess. Even if he could do it, would it really mean happiness for her? Whichever way he turned he saw only pain for her, and he himself was powerless. For several days he kept away from her, trying for her sake to conquer the tumult in his own heart.

Bruce meanwhile was having his own struggle. Bess had sent him no messages whatever. She knew now that he loved her, but since he had chosen silence she could but abide by it; both her love and her self-respect made that inevitable. Margaret, watching, was well pleased with her.

Her own hope, since Bruce had told her of his going away, had been that Bess would cease to care for him; and she wished now to see him start on his long journey without a look of encouragement or a word of explanation. She had come to know Hayne well in these last months, and recognized in him that rarest of all qualities in a man — a nature which is made to spend itself in love, rather than to receive that which another lavishes. She now felt that to be as essential as the quality of faithfulness which had so long been preëminent in her mind. The present necessity was to get Bruce away; but in the background of her thoughts hovered the hope that Bess might some day waken to a new and worthier love. She was sorry for Bruce, but she had no compassion to bestow on him at her daughter's expense; and when he asked after Bess, in daily increasing desire for some special word from her, he received but cold comfort from Bess's mother. Bess was very well. Bess had been exceedingly anxious about him, as they had all been; it had been a trying time. No, she had sent no message; of course he understood how glad they all were that he was better and would soon be among them again. Yes, Mr. Hayne called last night. He came every day to inquire, and was delighted that Bruce was at last doing so well. Bruce heard these things, in one shape or another, as often as he inquired.

He was slowly learning that it was all he deserved to hear. He suffered desperately in being so shut out from Bess's life; he was famished for her presence, perishing for one draught of hope. He tried to face the thought of the coming months, perhaps the coming years, away from her. Weak from his struggle with death, his heart yearned for her, while his pride gripped him and held him back. He had never gone back on any resolve that he had made; and this one — to assert his own independence, to accept nothing even from those he loved best — had been the determination of a lifetime. He had gloried in it as his chief strength, his one grace that set him apart from other men and made him worthy of the most perfect woman he had known; and he clung to it desperately though it clutched him and wrung his heart.

And yet against his will a new thought demanded entrance, returning as often as he barred it out — the thought that since he had given his love to Bess she had a right to a voice in the disposal of it. Was it fair to take back with one hand what he gave with the other, to hide from her the love she had created and owned by a right divine? He had little hope that she loved him; her indifference when she found he was going away and her continued silence now both forbade that; she might surely have turned from Hayne long enough to send some more individual message than the wholesale family con-

gratulations of which her mother was the bearer. But whether she really cared or not — and against all reason, and in the face of daily despair, hope sprang up again and again — had she not the right to know what she was to him, that his love was hers for life? He began to understand through his own misery what his silence would inflict on her if she did care. He had resented Margaret's condemnation with all his heart, but a sense of its justice sank slowly into him, though he was not yet ready to yield his will.

But day after day a change grew upon him. For after all, it was not in vain that he had faced death so long; he had seen life from the standpoint of those who are removed from it, and had caught something of its true perspective; and though all those days of desperate weakness seemed but a blank in his memory, yet the constantly recurring thought of what he owed to Bess showed that something of the vision remained with him. Slowly, imperceptibly, the centre of life began to shift. Pride seemed to hold him in the same unshaken grip, but love drew him more and more to see with Bess's eyes, to feel her right, to dread for her the pain for which he had once been cruel enough to hope. He grew more humble as he grew more wise, until at last he was fairly down in the valley of humiliation, and saw with Margaret that his love was as worthless as the money which he had demanded as the condi-

tion of offering it to the woman to whom it belonged.

All his world was in ruins. His lifelong confidence in his own judgment, even in his own spiritual integrity, crumbled away. He saw himself anew, a different individuality of an unsuspected baseness. His physical weakness lent emphasis to the severity of the self-revelation, and that in turn reacted on his physical condition.

"You've been overdoing some way or other," said the doctor. "You don't get out of here to-morrow, young man."

Bruce offered no objection. He had no strength to waste in contention with Dr. Ward; he needed it all for his confession to Bess. For he meant to tell her everything, to tell her to-morrow. He would keep back nothing, and would lay his life and his love in her hands to do with as she would. But what would she decide? To hope seemed madness, and he had not the strength to face despair. Out of sheer exhaustion he fell asleep at last and slept far into the morning.

One of the nurses had been dismissed, and the other was now often relieved from duty, and sent out for fresh air, or to find congenial companionship in the kitchen until the sound of Bruce's bell should recall him.

As soon as he was dressed this morning Bruce sent the man out. He waited until the sound of

his footsteps died away, and then rose, steadying himself by the back of his chair, and walked across the room. At the door of the sitting room he paused, trembling from head to foot. Then he opened it and entered once more the dear, familiar room.

Bess had come in only a moment before. She was standing at the table in the centre of the room, turning over the papers and magazines, looking for something to read. As the door opened, she glanced up and met Bruce's eager gaze. At sight of her his whole soul leaped to his eyes, and outrunning the confession of his lips laid bare his heart before her. If she had never guessed the truth, she would have known it now beyond a doubt.

She stood quite still, the table between them, while he moved slowly toward her, his face a thin translucence overflowed by an inner light. Down through her eyes it searched, until that which she kept hidden there felt its power and stirred, and sprang to answer the unspoken appeal. All that she had to give was none too much, and her eyes told him so without reserve. He had reached the table and leaned on it, looking across at her and drinking in the worship of her eyes. And he had put his pride before this! The thought shook him like a blow. He must tell her everything; would she ever look at him like that again? He trembled out of sheer weakness, and Bess, seeing it, flew to his side.

"Oh, how dare you!" she cried. "Come here."

She led him a few steps farther to the lounge, helped him as he sank down among the cushions, and covered him with the afghan. She wheeled him nearer to the fire, until he felt its glow, and then, feeling his gaze still upon her, timidly, half shamed, she turned her eyes once more to his. Slowly the color rose in the face which had been as pale as his own, and the lids fell over the eyes that had told so much. Bruce caught her hand.

"My darling —"

"Oh, hush!" cried Bess. "Isn't this enough?"

"But I must tell you — I want to know —"

"You know enough already," she answered impetuously, the blood surging up in her face again. "Indeed I can't bear it now; let me go away." Her eyes implored him like a child's.

The sense of his power over her went through him. Who would have thought her face could look like that? — and it was for him, for him! He looked at her exultantly. She shrank back, moving her head uneasily, and he closed his eyes to release her, while the tide of life rose within him, swelling in every vein.

"You may go if you will," he said gently, "but I won't say anything to disturb you if you will stay; I will wait as long as you wish. But I want to tell you about my going away. It will mean a great deal to me if you will listen. Will you sit down here?"

She drew up the ottoman and waited.

"I have meant to marry you some day, if I could, ever since I was a boy. But I thought manhood and independence required that I should first be your equal in fortune. I didn't think that would be very difficult until the phosphate was discovered; that seemed to put you out of my reach, and I tried to give you up. But I couldn't, so I began to plan to make a great fortune out of nothing. I felt if I did not do that I was stooping below a mark which I had set for myself, that I was lessening my strength of will. I knew most men wouldn't do that way, and I was proud of it; I thought I was stronger, more manly, than the rest. I didn't think you cared for me; but if you did you must suffer as I would until my pride was appeased — only I didn't call it pride. Dear, do you understand? It was myself before you. Can you forgive me, or trust me again?" He looked at her, his face pale and wretched; Margaret's words rang in his ears.

"If you should ever need forgiveness, I would forgive you. But to trust you is my own constant necessity which I meet with every breath I draw."

"But, Bess —"

"Don't say another word. Why should you worry over what never happened, or could happen? You wouldn't have gone that way."

"I should have been gone now but for that shot."

"I don't believe it! Now look at me, Bruce. Don't you see I'm too charming to run away from? Oh, I didn't ask you to look everything at once!" She held her hand up between her eyes and his.

"You make light of it to keep me from worrying," he said; "but I cannot rest until I am sure you understand. I am a poorer man than I thought I was — far poorer in soul than in purse. I have loved you unworthily. Can you understand that, and yet love me, or believe in me?"

"I can do nothing else. It isn't easy for me to say things, Bruce, and I don't think I will very often; so remember. I have never thought you were perfect, and perhaps we may need to forgive one another often; but love only grows by things like that. And if your thought of love has grown from a smaller to a larger one, what is there to forgive? It only proves that your love is a living, vital thing — a thing to trust. But if you should ever do anything that really does need forgiveness, or if I should, why should we be afraid? That is one of the things that love is for. Wouldn't you forgive me?"

"Dear —"

"Then understand me by yourself. It seems to me to be troubled by a thing like that is more a doubt of another's love than of one's own. I hope you will never doubt me, Bruce."

He looked at her and started to speak, but she

held up her hand for silence and shook her head.

"You have talked too long already. Dr. Ward would call me a wretched nurse. If you say another word, I must go away. If you will lie with your eyes closed, I will sit here until you go to sleep."

"I am not in the least sleepy," he protested; "and I am not tired at all. — Oh, come back, tyrant! I'll be quiet."

She sat down again. "When you wake up there is one thing you may tell me about," she said amiably. "You said you had intended to — that you had cared, you know — ever since you were a boy. I like that. That is really the most sensible remark you've made to-day. — Not now. Shut your eyes."

He closed them, smiling, moving his hand until it found hers and held it in a light clasp. The room was very quiet. For a long time she sat beside him, smiling when he opened his eyes dreamily now and then to look at her, until at last, notwithstanding his protest, he fell asleep. She drew her hand away softly then, and let the tears come as they would. For oh, he was so changed, so changed! Even now she could scarcely believe that he would live, he was so thin and white and weak. The tears ran over as she looked at him, and love and fear and joy laid hold upon her until she could contain herself no longer. She bent toward him stealthily, brush-

ing his cheek ever so lightly with her lips. He stirred a little, smiling in his sleep, and in a sudden panic she ran out into the hall. She paused there, half turning to the steps which led to her own room; then, feeling that nothing smaller than the wide sky could match her mood, she snatched a cape from the hall closet and ran down to the old beech.

Such a different old beech it was from the one under which she had thrown herself only a few weeks before! Such a different country! It was winter still, but winter in its kindliest mood. The veil which hid the earth's rich life was lifted a little that one might understand she was not dead, but only happily asleep. All through the sunny air ran the promise of the coming spring; and under the low-hung winter sun the silvery gauze of the hillside mists shimmered like bridal veils. A bold-hearted mocking-bird tilted on a high branch overhead, his pointed wings drooping, his tail twitching, as he turned his bright eye on the bare twigs about him, hopping from one to another in glad content till singing time should come. A bluebird flashed by, a living jewel against the old walls of stone. Far off a prophet redbird called, clear, insistent, sweet; and presently his faith was answered, for from the thicket beyond the fence came another call, timid, half doubting. The waking time was near at hand, and even now life stirred in its sleep, dreaming of days to

come. From first to last how good it was — springtime and harvest, summer and winter, life, and love, and sleep, and resurrection!

She sat in the old seat among the tree roots, her head leaning against its trunk, drinking in joy and thankfulness, quieted and strengthened by the patient confidence of the world about her, until she suddenly remembered that she had left Bruce quite alone, and without the means of summoning help if he should need it. She ran back to the house, kissing her hand as she went to the mocking-bird, who turned his sharp eye full upon her, twitching his tail frantically. She smiled up at him.

"Don't look so superior, little brother," she said; "I can feel my own wings to-day."

At the sitting-room door she checked herself. Her mother was on the ottoman at Bruce's side. She rose as Bess came in, and the girl went forward, her color deepening a little, her happy eyes on her mother's face. Margaret slipped her arm around her and leaned her cheek to hers, so that Bess could not see her eyes.

"Bruce has told me all about it, dear," she said; "and you can guess my hopes for both of you. But we must not let him talk any more now; there will be plenty of time for that, since he is not going to Labrador. I am going to send Williams in with his lunch. You might stay here and see that he doesn't forget to eat, and then I should turn him over to

Williams for a while. He can stay right where he is for his afternoon rest."

This programme was faithfully carried out, and it was not until the early twilight that Bruce heard the step he was listening for, and Bess came in and sat beside him again in the bright glow of the fire.

When Viry came home, late in the afternoon, she heard of Bruce's advent in the sitting room, and went upstairs in unwonted thankfulness. But as she sat in her own room the longing to see him again grew irresistible. It was one of the two things for the sake of which she had been willing, these many weeks, still to endure her wretched life. Twilight was already falling when she gathered courage to go downstairs. She had always been free to take from the rooms below any books or papers which she wished to read; she could go to the sitting room now as if for a magazine. If no one saw or heard her she would only stand in the doorway for one sight of his face, and come back to her own solitary place. She had a horror of his seeing her or speaking to her again, the last tones of his voice were too present with her; and she trembled to think of what he must feel toward her now that she had so nearly caused his death. But if she could stand unseen and look at him once more, there would be only one thing left to come to pass before she could throw off the burden of her life. She must know that

Bess was happy. What it was that had gone wrong between her and Bruce she could not imagine; but there was something, or he would not be going away. She would not seek rest for herself until the two whom she loved came together; but that sooner or later they would do so she had no doubt. Her one comfort in life was her belief that what she regarded as her own sacrifice would avail to purchase their happiness.

She crept noiselessly through the darkening hall, hurrying to be back again before Jordan should come in to light the house. She would hide behind the heavy curtains in the doorway and see him, herself unseen. As she reached the opening she pushed the nearest curtain carefully aside and looked in. Her heart gave a great leap, and then stood still until she gasped for breath. Jordan's voice in the back hall recalled her to herself, and she ran up the steps again as noiselessly as a bird flies through the air. Ah, she had seen his face, seen it as she would have it! And Bess — Viry threw herself upon her bed in a storm of tears in which were mingled her life's joy and sorrow, the long anguish and the one happiness she had known.

She was free at last. No one could possibly miss her, and there was no reason left for bearing her intolerable load another hour. She rose and walked with quiet decision across the room. The means of escape had long been ready, and now the time was come.

XXIII

JUST before dinner Dick came in from the village, bringing the late mail. Among the letters was one for Margaret from the president of Viry's college. There would be an unexpected vacancy in the preparatory school connected with the college by the middle of February, he found, and he wrote at once to offer the place to Viry through her. He added an account of the work required and the amount of salary paid.

The letter was doubly welcome to Margaret. More than ever she desired to get Viry out of the house, and this would insure her final departure within a couple of weeks. When she went upstairs that night she paused at the door leading to the back hall, and went down to Viry's room; she would tell her before she slept.

As she neared the room the sound of stertorous breathing fell on her ears, and she quickened her steps. As she opened the door the air was heavy with the odor of laudanum. She ran to a window in the dark to throw it open, and then, hurrying, felt for the matches and lit the gas.

Viry was lying across the bed, unconscious, and drawing slow, heavy, labored breaths. Her hand was thrown out over the edge of the bed,

and the half-emptied bottle had fallen from her fingers, its contents running out on the floor. Her face was ghastly; her jaw had dropped; life seemed almost gone.

Margaret threw open the other windows, and ran downstairs to call Dick.

"Dr. Ward was here just before dusk and said he expected to take dinner with Mr. Bruce this evening; if he hasn't gone back it won't take long to get him. Run to Bruce's office to telephone. Bring him in the back way when he comes."

Fortunately, Bess had already gone to her room, and Williams was still in the kitchen. Margaret called him, and the two went up to the unconscious girl.

"She's pretty far gone, Mrs. Lawton," he said; "she must 'a' took it hours ago."

"We will do what we can," said Margaret, briefly. "Dr. Ward is coming."

They went to work with all the skill and energy at their command. The horror which Margaret had first felt, and with which she was yet to reckon, left her entirely. Her whole nature was absorbed in the elemental struggle of life with death. Whatever aspect they may wear in life, each man and woman who reaches that meeting-point of fear and aspiration typifies for the time the passion of all the ages, and is clothed with the worth and dignity of the race. All Margaret's faculties were alert, her will

hardening into an iron determination that this life should not be swallowed up of death.

Dick came to the door before long, bringing Dr. Ward, and besought his mother to let him call some of the women servants, or Bess, or even that he himself might be allowed to take her place; but she would listen to nothing which he could suggest, and he finally turned away.

All night the three fought with death for Viry. The winter dawn, gray and late, woke in the cold sky. The light grew slowly and spread about the room, bringing out ashen hues on the tired faces, deadening everything even as it revealed it, while the gas-light dimmed to an ineffectual, ghostly flare. And in the daylight death shrank and faded, while step by step they forced him from the room, until at last Viry lay on the bed ghastly, weak to exhaustion, but once more a living woman and not a clod.

Bess had learned the truth from Dick when she searched the house after going to her mother's unused room for her usual morning greeting. She was in the sitting room now with Bruce, who must be kept in ignorance of the tragedy upstairs. Breakfast was over. By Margaret's direction Bess had had a cot placed in her mother's dressing-room, and there they carried Viry and left her, while Margaret threw herself upon her bed. The dressing-room had no door except that leading into Margaret's bedroom; she did not dare trust Viry out of her

reach until she could fathom the cause of the girl's action and find some way to prevent its repetition. She closed the connecting door presently, seeing Viry already asleep, locked her own door softly and removed the key, and changing her dress for a loose wrapper, lay down again, soon sleeping, like Viry herself, the sleep of utter exhaustion.

She slept for several hours, and when she woke Bess brought her lunch and sat with her while she ate it. Then she went away, promising to see that her mother was undisturbed until she should come downstairs or ring her bell. Viry was still asleep.

Bess had looked after the replenishing of the fire, and Margaret drew her chair before it and fell into troubled thought. The horror of last night returned upon her, horror of what she believed to be one of the greatest crimes within the power of man. Her religious belief was sincere and deep; and at the heart of it was a conviction that life would impart life and love triumph in the end. It was in this belief that she had taken Viry as a child, that she had tried all these years to perform love's task, to impart to her a noble life; and last night's catastrophe seemed to arraign either the genuineness of her love as a wife, or the truth of her belief.

If Viry had come to her as a woman grown, she would have expected any amount of failure; but the girl had been with her almost from her

babyhood. Whatever force heredity might have she had never believed that environment could not mould and direct it; she did not believe it now. That being so, and granting that Viry had not been a hopelessly abnormal child, one of two things was true: either her whole understanding of life was false, or she herself had fallen grievously short in some way, and had failed to live the truth she knew.

She had never expected to make Viry, or even Dick or Bess, just what she herself would have them; but if there were real vital force in her it should suffice to determine the general trend of their lives toward courage and righteousness and truth. However dimly they might apprehend the light, their faces would be set toward it, and not away from it; and Viry had turned her back.

That her belief was false, that life was incapable of awakening life, that love was only a dream of power, was unthinkable; the failure lay in herself. But where? She searched the past, groping the dim recesses of her memory, and found no trace of what she sought; so far as consciousness went she had done her best. Then the failure was unconscious, the failure of ignorance; and where could it be found? Could the knowledge of blindness create sight? A sudden wave of pity for herself swept over her — pity for the long, blind years of futile effort, of passionate straining after that which

had been set beyond her reach, which all her powers combined could never master. For she had done her best. For Philip's sake, in all that long, hard task she had done her best.

For Philip's sake! As the sudden lightning cleaves the dark, and shows the edge of the abyss and the narrow path whereby one has climbed to ruin, the words flashed through her clouded thoughts, and in the twinkling of an eye she had seen the truth. It had been for Philip's sake, and through him for her own. What had she done for Viry? She put her hands over her eyes unwittingly, as if to shut out some blinding glare. Viry had been right to distrust her; the girl's instinct was truer than her own. For Viry herself, apart from Philip, she had scarcely had a thought, beyond now and then, perhaps, a fleeting, perfunctory compassion. That had been all, at least, until the last six months, until the outcast so long tolerated had dared to intrude upon that sacred circle where Margaret's love lavished itself. Her cheeks burned as her own thoughts rose, one by one, looked her in the face, and passed. When it promised to work good for Bess, had she not wished Viry set in the forefront of temptation that she might suffer for her daughter's gain? When the girl had come a step nearer, and laid her hand on Philip's secret, had she not cast her out? The moment that her service to Philip allowed it she had swept her out of

her life. Her compassion had never rung true; no wonder Viry had refused to be deceived by the counterfeit which she had offered her in this very room.

She was a proud woman, prouder than she had known. She had thought often that few women would have done for their husbands the thing which she had done. She had gloried in her sacrifice, in the love which had made it possible. Even if the child had been white it would have been a great-hearted thing to do, she had thought, a thing meet for a noble woman and a noble love. She shrank down in her chair, pressing her hands once more against her eyes. But she had seen the truth and nothing could shut it out. All these long years selfishness had been her inspiration; and she had called it love, and wondered that the pale eyes defied her and the red lips curled, while the wilful feet spurned the path she so carefully marked out.

This was the end of it — shipwreck and ruin for Viry, failure and misery for herself. She sat stolidly in her place, looking vacantly at the flickering blaze. She had come to the end of everything.

There was a stir in the dressing-room. Bess had left the door ajar when she went to see if Viry still slept, and as she turned and sighed the sound was plainly to be heard. Margaret went to her. She was awake, looking with wide, dull eyes at the unfamiliar place in which she

found herself. When she saw Margaret she half rose, frowning.

"Lie still," said Margaret. "I did not know that you were awake, or I would have come in sooner. I will ring for your lunch, and after you eat something you must try to sleep again."

"I am not hungry," answered Viry, obstinately, "and I want to go to my room."

"Do as I wish for once, Viry, without contention. I am as tired as yourself."

Viry looked at her in surprise. There was a dead hopelessness in her voice, a weariness in her face and figure, which she had never known before. The girl flushed as she looked at her, half resentful, half ashamed. She lay down again without speaking, and Margaret rang the bell. Bess brought the lunch herself, but did not come in.

"Poor mother," she whispered, drawing her to the door and kissing her, "won't I do for Viry? You look ill, mother; let me help."

Margaret shook her head. "You promised, dear. Run away."

She closed the door again and carried the waiter into the little room, where she propped Viry with pillows and fed her. The girl was still very weak, and after the first protest submitted quietly, wondering dully at the misery in Margaret's face. She knew better than to suppose that it was there for her; but it was curious to see.

Margaret sat patiently raising one spoonful after another to Viry's lips, waiting when she grew tired, urging her gently to take more, until the light meal was finished. Something in the simple act, the common meeting of life's most common need, seized upon her emotion without announcing itself clearly to her mind. Her hand began to tremble, her whole body to quiver at last, and tears gathered and pressed behind her lids. She could not understand what moved her, but an awed sense grew upon her that something stood on the threshold of her life — something of which she need not be afraid. She dropped the spoon at last and drew out the pillows gently. Her hands were cold, and as she tried to speak her lips quivered.

"Lie here quietly, Viry, until I come again. Go to sleep if you can."

Viry raised her eyes once more to protest, then closed them quickly lest they should be seen to see. For Margaret's calm was broken and gone, her face was in an agony, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. She turned abruptly into her own room, closing the door behind her, and fell upon the bed, burying her face in the pillows, while the storm of tears shook her from head to foot.

What was it that had touched her? What veiled thing stood just beyond her conscious knowledge, apprehended only of her heart? Slowly her sobs subsided, until she lay in perfect quiet,

waiting for that which was to come. And then her mind grew clear and understood.

Her body had paid the price for Viry's body; she had saved her physical life at the expense of her own strength; she had fed it in its desperate weakness, and drawn it back toward health. And the thing she had believed was true; life could impart life, could control and nourish it, if life would pay the price. That she had paid it for Viry's physical life every aching muscle and nerve bore witness; but the price for her other life she had never offered: would she pay it now, and win?

Again she trembled as she saw the task that lay before her. She had not yet consented to undertake it, but she knew by some secret process of consciousness that she would consent, even as she knew that for the moment consent was beyond her power. To see the truth, to her, had long meant to follow it; and no matter what happened first, the habit of her life would rule.

But she could win nothing without paying for it. If she would enter the depths of Viry's nature, she must open the depths of her own. She could not shield Philip. She closed her eyes, and thought stopped for her and life waited; so far she had come and she must rest.

Presently she started on again, breathing painfully, her body lying motionless, her soul toiling up the pitiless ascent. It was not right that

Philip should be shielded; they must pay the price together. Her forgiveness was not enough. More, far more, than he had wronged his wife he had wronged the life which he had given; until Viry forgave him he could not stand absolved. It was not enough that she herself should wait upon this woman of a lower race, confessing her own cruel selfishness; the girl must be told of Philip's penitence, she must know his shame. Again she rested, panting. It was incredible, impossible — this thing that she knew was true. She moaned softly, turning her head from side to side as if seeking some way of escape, but there was no escape. Turn as she would, the Law gripped her; though justice might be thrust aside, love was inexorable.

Then, because she could go no further on that path, her mind turned to Viry herself, comprehending in one swift instant all that on which for years she had looked with such careless eyes. She put herself in Viry's place, a double outcast all her days, stripped, hopeless, desolate; and there at last she halted, until that which she saw and felt sank into her deepest thought, and ate out all her pride. To steady a life under that hard load, to lift it from the pit of despair and give it hopefulness and courage, was it not worth the price? Once more she buried her face and wept —the worn, spent, thankful weeping of one who rests at the end of the last march.

XXIV

Viry had fallen asleep again, and slept until the sun went down and the young moon, sailing high in heaven, whitened the winter world. Bess had come back, bringing a little tray for Margaret, and once more imploring her mother to come away and let her take her place. Margaret stood in the doorway, herself in shadow, and taking the girl's face between her two hands turned it to the light burning lower down the hall. She kissed her tenderly — this daughter of hers who would walk amid abundance of all things of which Viry must go in want.

"Bruce is better," she said, smiling; "I see it in your eyes. Go back, dear heart; one's first day with one's lover comes but once. And, dear, do not be troubled about me. I have been thinking about your father to-day; I feel that the last veil of separation between us has been taken away. It is a white day to me as to you. Now go."

Bess kissed her, rubbing her cheek against her mother's with her old childish caress, and drew slowly away from her. Margaret pushed her gently.

"Go," she said, "Bruce is waiting."

Bess turned and walked away, flushing and smiling, but looking back until her mother closed the door.

The room was a corner one, lighted by four great windows, through which the moonlight shone. Margaret drew a little rocking-chair near one of them and sat down, the moonlight falling across her lap. Presently, though she had heard no sound, the door of the dressing-room opened softly, and Viry went slowly and silently toward the hall door. They had brought her there that morning in a heavy wrapper thrown over her nightdress, and she had put it on again and was stealing back to her own room. She had not seen Margaret and supposed she had gone away. She started violently when she heard her name.

"Viry," said Margaret, "come here first."

She paused irresolute.

"Come," repeated Margaret. "I do not want to speak of what has happened, Viry; I want to tell you something about myself."

Viry came toward her and seated herself in a low chair near Margaret's, wondering at something strange in her voice, and leaning forward a little to see her face, remembering the tears. But she was all in the deep shadow, except that the moonlight fell across her lap, and on her two hands lying white upon it, one above the other.

"You said once, Viry, that I had had a happy life; and that is true, only not quite as you sup-

pose. I knew my husband from the time we were both children, and I must have loved him all my life, though I did not know it when he first began to speak of love. I think we were made for each other. We were so happy — there are no words to tell! I lived to answer to him; what he called for in me woke, and what he did not call for slept until he wanted it. Perhaps we were selfish in our happiness, but it was a perfect thing."

Her voice was low and musing, as if she were merely thinking aloud. Viry listened, wondering.

"When the children came they were more of Philip for me to love. I could not think of them apart from him. For nearly eight years we lived together, and his love for me was as perfect as he himself. There was no flaw anywhere."

Her voice fell into silence, and then came again out of the darkness, with a clear evenness which touched Viry's wondering attention with a sense of repressed suffering deeper than the sorrow of which she spoke.

"He was thrown from his buggy one day and hurt, as you must have heard. His horse was frightened by something and dashed across the railroad in front of a switching engine. He was thrown out and his head was struck. They brought him home unconscious. He had left me only an hour before. For days he did not know me. I sat here by his bed day and night, trying

to fight off death. Nothing was alive in me except what Philip needed: all the rest could wait. After ages he woke and knew me. But he did not get well; his will seemed paralyzed by the shock. I had thought the fight was won when he came to consciousness, but now I sat beside him and died again, inch by inch.

"One day the doctor took away almost my last hope. I went back upstairs to him at once; I was too near eternal darkness to waste one moment of the light. But when I came to his door something choked me. I did not dare go in till I was calm. I went on to what was then my own room. I knew he needed my self-control, and I must have it again even at the price of staying away from him. — Then I heard that door."

Again she paused, and a long, shivering breath spent itself in the darkness. The two white hands turned together in the moonlight and gripped one another convulsively. Viry leaned toward the shadows with parted lips.

"I flew down the hall to stop the sound. There was a woman coming toward Philip's door — a negro woman, nearly white. — God!" The word broke from her as a prayer, an agonized cry for help. Then she steadied herself and went on, her voice sunk to a whisper and breaking as she spoke.

"She had heard that he was dying. She had come for money — for her child. For Philip's

child. I sent her away. I looked at her as she went. I did not understand how she could live even if I had not looked at her; my thought should have been enough.

"I started back to my room. I did not dare come in here to Philip; I must waste the time again. But he called me; he had heard; I had to go. And Philip — he saw my anger, he thought I believed it. And so he told me the truth."

The hands were caught back into the darkness and pressed against her throat. Viry was trembling from head to foot.

"His body lived. Every one thought Philip was well again. But whether I looked at him or shut my eyes, I knew that Philip was dead, and that what was left was only a festering corpse. Five months I lived with it in this house. I never called it Philip in my thoughts. But I lived in the house with it, I pretended to every one that it was Philip. I did it for the children's sakes. No one guessed the truth except Aunt Dilsey. She knew before; the woman was her niece.

"Then the thing that had been Philip was ill. I waited on it as I had done on him; no one suspected. I had thought of him as dead so long that when the doctor said Philip would die I did not understand at first. He thought I loved what was upstairs as I had loved Philip; he was sorry for me.

"I went back to the room. I could scarcely breathe. It began to talk to me — about the child. Viry," — her voice broke. She sobbed a little; then her hands, tightly clasped again, fell back into the moonlight, and she went on once more.

"Philip came back to me," she said passionately. "Here in this very room he rose from the dead. We have never been separated since. He had gone beyond me — far, far! I had wrapped myself in pride, like any Pharisee, and Philip, the publican, had found God. I cannot tell you what it was like, Viry, for it is I who must speak for him, not he himself; but think your deepest of penitence, your highest of nobleness, and perhaps you can understand. And it was not all for me; I never fully understood until to-day. He wanted my forgiveness — though I was not fit to give it except that I loved him so — but it was the child too. He knew, though I did not. The wrong he had done me filled my world; there was no place left for the wrong he had done the child; I was blind to it; but Philip — Philip saw. He went at last with a groan because of it. He knew that if we forgave each other it would blot out every cloud from between our souls; but for the child he saw the deeper wrong, the lifelong misery, the almost certain sin. He saw it, and despaired."

Her voice trembled into silence again. The

beating of Viry's heart half strangled her. The blood surged in her ears.

"He went away from me — oh, so soon! We had scarcely begun to speak. I had no time to tell him anything. There was no way to show him how I loved him, how all my life I would repent. He was mine again, yet I could not reach him. And he had gone under that awful shadow — that nothing could save the child."

She waited a little, breathing deeply, but evenly. Her hands loosed their convulsive grasp and lay together more lightly.

"I could do nothing for him, I thought at first, nothing any more. But the thought of the child kept coming. If I could save the child, his last burden would be lifted. If I took the child and did my best for it, it would be the uttermost proof of my love, and the only proof left for me to give. — Do you understand me, Viry?"

"Yes, Miss Margaret."

"Aunt Dilsey brought you here, and I tried to do my best. I never spared myself. I thought of you day and night; I prayed and planned for you, year after year. Yet you never trusted me. I tried to win your confidence; I never could. I suffered over it; I prayed, I wept; I tried again and again, until the time came when I despaired. I do not ask you to believe me, Viry, I ask nothing of you

any more; but I was honest in what I did. My failure wrung my heart; I could not understand it — until to-day. And now that I see it, my pride is in the dust."

"Miss Margaret," said Viry, with quivering lips.

"No, wait a little; let me say it all. Be patient a little longer." After a moment she went on: "When you stood here and taunted me with my selfish happiness, and challenged me to tell you these hidden things, I could bear nothing more. I had done my best and failed, and I would not keep you in my sight. I tried to find some place to send you to; I meant never to see you again or try to help you. Last night the letter came, and I went to your room to tell you — oh, God was merciful! I did not come too late!

"The completeness of my failure overwhelmed me; I had only seen its outer edge before. While you were asleep in yonder I sat here trying to understand. And then I saw the truth. It had all been for Philip's sake, and through him, for my own; and not at all for yours. You were right to distrust me, Viry; you were wiser than I. I did not know it, but what you thought of me was true."

Viry leaned forward, brushing her skirt with her hand timidly. "Forgive me, Miss Margaret," she said; "I never knew you till to-night."

"It is you who must forgive," said Margaret,

steadily. "It was your forgiveness, not mine, that Philip needed most. That is the greatest of all sins — to create a life that has no right to be. I ask forgiveness for him. I ask it for us both; I cannot separate myself from him, and we have both sinned against you."

"Miss Margaret, I — "

"Wait. Think what forgiveness means. It means that you accept the life that was thrust upon you. It means that you bear the burden from which he is forever free. It means that you take the curse of life and turn it into a blessing. It can mean nothing less."

Viry was silent. Margaret sat watching her as the moonlight moved slowly toward her face across the darkened air.

"I am ashamed to offer you help, Viry," she said presently, "I need it so much myself; and I am ignorant where I thought I had learned wisdom. But however dimly I saw it, the light that I saw was true. And, Viry, there is something better than escape. I scarcely dare say it to you," she went on in growing agitation, "your burden is so much greater than my own; but the best of life is victory, and not escape. I have thought of it so long. Even after Philip was mine again, I thought for years — If it had not been true! if he had been as I thought him once; if there had been nothing for love to forgive! I could not bear it. There were days when it maddened me to look at you — to think that in anything,

most of all in that, love should need to stoop. And then I came to see that that was why love should be — to bear, to stoop, to lift, never to faint nor fail. If we were strong and perfect, where were the need of love? I had claimed love's joy and tried to shirk its burden, and so I had missed its heart. Viry, I did find peace. There must be sorrow, some way, somehow, to him who walks in love; there is never any escape. There comes a time when love seems all sorrow, and the joy only a poor thin veiling of its awful depths. But if you will fathom the depths, if you will give up your life and sink down, down, into the lowest place — there is joy there, Viry. I am not worthy to know the mystery, but as I am a living woman, it is true!"

"Is it true for me?" asked Viry. "Before you answer, think what my life must be."

"If love fails in the bitterest case, it fails in all. And I know it cannot fail; I have tested it all these years. You must go deeper than I, Viry; there are depths beyond any I have found: but you will know more of love than I. And it will be worth the price."

"To live with negroes and for negroes," said Viry, slowly; "that I could do: people have done that for much lower races. But to do it as if I were one of them, to have no one suspect the difference, to have no sense of oneness with my own people to fall back upon! — It is not a

voluntary sacrifice; it is a tame submission to an enforced injustice!"

"Viry, there is justice at the heart of it, and truth, and love, if you will look at it in a world-wide way. The real injustice was Philip's in giving you a life for which no race could make a home. But great as Philip's wrong to you was, the issue is with yourself alone; you can make it your doom or your triumph. Viry, will you forgive him?"

Again there was silence. The old clock on the landing struck seven, the sound echoing through the still house. They heard Dick come into the hall downstairs from the sitting room, calling back some laughing message to Bess from the door of his den before it closed after him.

"One can live two lives at once," Margaret went on. "One of them is down in the press and strain — down in the mire, often. It is all hedged in with narrowness and pain, and it touches everything that it can help. It cannot draw back from anything, and it can see nothing, understand nothing, but the day's clamor and need. If it is your only life it is terrible. But even as one struggles there, one may live another life, high, and lifted up. It is above time, and every moment it looks back toward the unseen beginning, and forward toward the unseen end. It sees that the other life has its rightful place, and it pours strength into it, and hope. It is above all strife and change. Only

the free souls reach it — those who accept the Law. And they are all of one race who climb there: down in the other life there may be Jew and Greek, rich and poor, bond and free; but the soul can live where none of these things may come. The souls of slaves have found that life and revelled in it while they did their masters' will; and the souls of emperors have found freedom there, and because of it have been willing to live and reign. Viry," her voice broke, and then went on through tears — "if Philip forced upon you the life of strain, he made the other life possible for you, too. Does it count for nothing with you? Will you forgive him that he gave you life?"

She stretched her hands out pleadingly, leaning toward the girl through the darkness. Her face was still in shadow, but the moonlight caught the dropping of her tears. Viry touched her hand half doubtfully, and then grasped it as she felt Margaret's firm clasp on hers. Her own tears fell unchecked.

"I do forgive him," she said brokenly; "I will live my life. But for you, Miss Margaret, for you" — tears choked her. She slipped to the floor and raised the hem of Margaret's dress to her lips. "Teach me," she said humbly; "forgive me, and be my friend."

Downstairs Bess and Bruce had spent a golden day. At twilight they were by the fire, he on

the lounge and she on the ottoman beside him, when Jordan came in to draw the blinds and light the room as usual.

"Oh, don't shut out the twilight, Jordan," said Bess. "It's too soon for lights. Let the room alone, and I'll light the lamps myself presently, and Mr. Dick will close the blinds for me."

"Yassum," said Jordan, respectfully, and grinned appreciatively as soon as he was safe in the hall.

Bess and Bruce enjoyed the twilight while it lasted, and then found the firelight equally delightful. They quite forgot the blinds, and it was not until Dick came in that they remembered the lamps. Bess lit them then in some haste. They cleared the centre-table and had dinner served there, a merry meal for the three. Afterward Dick sat with them a little while, and then went to his den, protesting that he had letters to write for the early mail.

Bess drew a deep low chair to one side of the hearth for Bruce, and pushed her ottoman beside him, her head resting on his shoulder, his arm about her, as they talked of old sorrow and the new joy.

Hayne had ridden over again, his thoughts still a tangle of impossible schemes, but unable to endure his suspense any longer without a glimpse of Bess's face. He came up the steps now, and glanced in some surprise at the bright

light streaming from the unshuttered windows. Then he saw Bess, and his heart stopped beating for a second which seemed an hour. They were sitting almost facing the window, and Bruce's arm was about her still, her head thrown back upon it, looking up. His eyes were on her face; to him, as to Hayne, the room held nothing else.

Hayne stood in the shadow of the pillar, his hands closed tight, his hungry heart drinking in the look which could never be turned to him.

"God bless her," he said softly. "God bless her always!"

Then he took his eyes away resolutely, and turning back went out into the wide silence of the moonlit night.

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